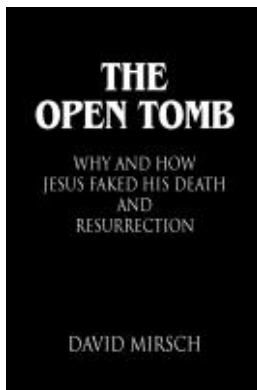


THE OPEN TOMB

WHY AND HOW
JESUS FAKED HIS DEATH
AND
RESURRECTION

DAVID MIRSCH



The Open Tomb re-examines the historical record about Jesus, and discovers his political motives for faking his death and resurrection. Taken directly from the Gospels, the Dead Sea Scrolls and First Century historians, the book sheds new light on the historical Jesus and, for the first time in two millennia, strips away Christian tradition, and exposes the truth.

The Open Tomb

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WHY AND HOW JESUS FAKED
HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

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Notes

The terms *Jew* or *Jewish*, though widely accepted today as designations for a person who follows the precepts of the Judaic religion and/or someone of Semitic descent are not the best or most accurate choice of words when used in association with studies of First Century biblical and social history. They are terms better suited for use after the advent of Rabbinic Judaism, which developed and was codified in the early centuries of the Common Era but well after the First Century and though Judaism did indeed develop from certain schools of religious thought centered in Judea in the First Century, it should hardly be considered a blanket reference term for the many and diverse religious and philosophical groups present at that time. These terms have, over the centuries, slipped into common usage with biblical scholars as a sort of short hand, an easy designation for those people of the Middle East who held the Torah as the central foundation of their lives and beliefs. Unfortunately, as with any short hand or terminology of convenience, much in the way of accuracy and precision has been lost, especially for the non-scholar who might rightfully assume that all keepers of the Torah in the First Century, Jews as the scholars would have it, shared the same beliefs, followed the same customs, abided the same laws and worshipped God in the same way, which, of course, was not the case. Also, other groups, like the Samaritans, who might reasonably be included with other keepers of the Torah, are generally pigeon-holed as strictly Samaritans but not as Jews, thus blurring a common philosophical ancestry between the two groups. Jew, then, as a descriptive term, does not serve the purpose for which it is intended and as it fails to do so, it seems reasonable to replace it.

Though several other terms are sometimes used loosely to describe these same people, such as Hebrew and Israelite, they often suffer from incorrect or casual usage as well. Like *Jew*, these terms have their time

and place, but as descriptive terms for the ethno-religious people of First Century Palestine they only serve to mislead and cloud our understanding of that time and culture. It is much the same obscuring terminology as that of *American Indian* that was in use for so long to describe the indigenous peoples of the North American continent. Such habitual misuse of socio-ethnic classifications, especially by non-affiliated or culturally “superior” groups generally leads to incorrect historical assumptions that make it difficult, if not impossible to fully understand the complete context of a particular historical episode. As will be seen later, the traditional New Testament translation of the Greek *Ioudaioi* as *Jews* rather than *Judeans* has implications that help obscure some of the facts of the Jesus story.

In looking at the Gospel of John, the gospel that makes the most egregious misuse of the mistranslation of *Ioudaioi* as *Jews* that was used over 70 times has been responsible over the centuries for much of the anti Jewish reaction that the Gospels have engendered. In those over seventy occurrences three distinct applications can be seen. The first classification renders an association to the temple leadership and the royal or tetrarchic authorities of the Jerusalem and provincial areas in general. For example, in John 1:19; “This is the testimony given by John when the Jews [Judeans] sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”” the reference is clearly to those in authority in Judea and more specifically the Temple. The second association is to members of the ethno-religious community whose religious viewpoint was based on the Temple in Jerusalem. As a result, John 2:6 refers to “Jewish rites of purification” (although in Greek the reading would be, “rites of purification of the Jews”), a reference to a people who, no matter where they lived, followed those religious doctrines and customs established by the Jerusalem Temple cult and referring to the *Jewish* population as a whole. The third association is to the people living strictly within the confines of the province of Judea, whether *Jewish* or not. An example of this association would be when the phrase “King of the Jews [Judeans]” is mentioned (as on the titulus). The reference is to the population of Judea as a whole, not to any one ethnic or social group. What is significant to understand is that

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all three references are anchored in their connection to the province of Judea. The political, social, philosophical and cultural milieu of Judea of that time was what defined those peoples and regardless of their disparate ethnic, social and religious associations, the common thread that drew all their lives together and allowed them to be referred to by a single term is their connection to Judea.

The blanket term *Jews* used in place of the more precise Judeans is, under these circumstances, very misleading and has done much over the centuries to hide the intent of the Gospel writers. *Jews*, in this context, indicates simply “keepers of the Torah”, so that the impression is given that the *Ioudaioi*, the *Jews*, of say John 9:18, represent a socio-religious viewpoint, especially by way of distinction to the co-mentioned Pharisees of the same passage. The Pharisees are the initial group to question the blind man, but are referred to as *Jews* when the group shows disbelief or are mentioned in a negative light (JN 9:22). The use of *Judeans* within the same context, on the other hand, indicates a socio-geographic allusion that gives the reference a much more precise meaning. The healing of the blind man then becomes (as it was intended) a political statement that condemns the Judeans for their lack of faith in the political agenda Jesus was preaching. That historians and biblical scholars have continually allowed this mistranslation to continue should be a cause for some concern and should be remedied. Biblical scholarship is sufficiently hampered by tradition without polemical translations adding to the difficulties.

What then should we call these *Jews*, these “keepers of the Torah” of the First Century? What term or name will serve to accurately identify them, so that vague or inaccurate labels will not hamper references to them in their time and place? I would propose the term Mosaeans (as opposed to Mosaics) would be a more accurate name for these people and while, like any label that defines and consequently restricts as it does so, this name suffers from its own limitations, I would suggest that those limitations are far fewer and less misleading than the currently used *Jew*. The belief in the law of Moses, as handed down directly from God, as the foundational belief system of these

First Century people is the one unifying and centralizing tenet that defines them all, no matter their geographical location or cultural refinements. Diasporan Mosaeans who lived in Rome or Corinth or Alexandria might have widely divergent views on the precise practice of their faith or the exact meaning of their laws but the foundational belief that Moses was the bringer of that practice and those laws was universal. The Torah was the keystone of their lives. The distance one lived from the Jerusalem Temple might dictate how one viewed animal sacrifice or the Temple tax or even the depth of one's faith, but it could not and did not alter one's core belief in Moses. Samaritans might have longed to rebuild their own competing temple on Mount Gerizim, Judeans might have hated and mistrusted Samaritans and Galileans might have seen themselves as rebels and outcasts but they all shared a belief in Moses the law giver, they were all Mosaeans. Using the term Mosaeans helps to relieve us of the short sightedness of tradition and the cultural egotism that continue to blind us today. Rather than trying to justify the schizophrenia of Jesus as a Galilean Jew (Judean), two terms that, taken together, are mutually exclusive and counter descriptive (one must necessarily be from Galilee or from Judea, not both) and therefore obscure rather than define the man, we can now refer to him more correctly as a Judean Mosaeans, a classification that defines him more clearly and allows us to place him correctly in his First Century context.

Another matter that requires some explanation and clarification is the definition of the Gospels. It is important to establish how they are viewed by contemporary historians and by Christian apologists and how they will be viewed within this work. What are they and how should they be viewed historically? Are they history as we understand the term or are they propaganda? Are they, as Crossan wonders, prophecy historicized or history prophesized? Most modern scholars see them as something akin to fictionalized history, not history as we today would understand it, but as an attempt to record the activities and sayings of a man without the restriction of absolute accuracy of time, place and corroboration and dependent always on the context of the message being recorded, much like an early docudrama. Most Christian

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apologists, on the other hand, tend to see them as more nearly biographical as we would accept the term today. They are the record of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ and the Son of God, and while there may be contradictions or errors within their written accounts they are to Christian apologists, in the fullest sense of the word, accurate in their details and context. Still others see them as a completely fictionalized account, a retro pseudo history of a non-existent god-man, a creative attempt to manufacture and develop the godhead for a new mystery religion.

When I first began the research that lead me to the conclusions contained within this work, I was highly skeptical of the historical accuracy of the Gospels. The obvious contradictions and divergences of storylines between the four accounts, the miracles and healings, the virgin birth, the deification of Jesus, the lack of corroboration with contemporary historical accounts, all left me very suspicious of their veracity and historical value. While I never was so incredulous as to question their authenticity (I found it difficult to believe that the Jesus story was created out of whole cloth in an attempt to start a new religious movement), I certainly felt that the story contained within their pages had more than a little fiction imbedded in it and that much more than a little creativity was required to flesh out the Jesus they presented. I saw them as nothing more than religious propaganda of the most obvious kind, designed to bring the story to a wider audience and to bring new converts into the fold. This view was of course heavily influenced by the intervening centuries of tradition that had anchored the story in a post Jewish Revolt reality that placed its emphasis on developing its Christianity and removed it almost entirely from its true context of pre-revolt politics. It wasn't long before I began to see the story beneath the story and to see the religious propaganda for the political propaganda that it was intended to be.

As this understanding gained greater currency for me, it became easier and easier to put Jesus back into his historical context and the story into its timeframe. The Gospels were still propaganda, but they were propaganda that made complete sense for their time and place.

Where as the Christianizing propaganda of the traditional interpretation of the Gospels insisted upon Jesus' fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the resultant schism his teachings wrought with the mainstream Mosaic philosophy of his time in order to fully understand and appreciate his message, the new understanding of the Gospels' propaganda required no such insistence. The story unfolded naturally, fitting well within its context of the early decades of the First Century amid all the political, social and religious turmoil that were evident at that time. Jesus stopped being a mythical miracle man who spawned a new religion and became what he always was, a highly motivated political leader of First Century Judea who's message remained pertinent up to the First Jewish Revolt. The Gospels were the multi-layered and clandestine transmission of that message, as they had to be, in the Roman occupied world of first century Palestine. The spirituality of Jesus' message was there, certainly, but as a cover that provided plausible deniability should it be examined by the Romans or by the domestic powers that controlled the Jerusalem temple and the populace at large. Political subversion, the attempt to radically change the established order of things, seldom sees the light of day in an occupied country and Jesus' message was no different. It had to be hidden beneath the layers of his parables and other teachings in order to protect the messenger. In part, that explains Jesus' repeated admonitions for secrecy within the Gospels; to deflect attention from his activities that would draw too close scrutiny to his message, exposing the real political motive behind them. As long as he remained a poor, itinerant healer and prophet who spoke in parables about matters of faith and spiritual redemption, he was free to spread the word about the coming Kingdom of Heaven but his ministry would have been very short lived had the ruling powers understood the deeper meaning encased within his teachings.

Because of this deeper meaning and because of the political ramifications layered within the Gospels, their dating (or more precisely, the dating of the core teachings within them) should be reassigned a much earlier date. While current scholarship generally dates the Gospels from the very earliest suggested dates of the 40s and 50s of the common era to as late as 110CE for the Gospel of John, I

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would suggest that even the earliest of these dates is not early enough. The Gospels were not, strictly speaking, biographical, which might be expected to be written after the fact, but instead were political propaganda that could reasonably be expected to be written concurrently with Jesus' preaching in order to most effectively disseminate his message to the broadest audience. Nor should it be assumed that because the message of his ministry was political in nature that this automatically means that there is no historical existence behind the propaganda. Even though the Gospels were clearly redacted and amended throughout their early years, there is no reason to assume that their core message was not available to the populace very early in their history, perhaps as early as the 30s in some written form and orally even earlier. The transmission of the political message would require such an early dating because that was when the movement based on Jesus' teachings was at its most prominent point, and though the movement did change and alter its priorities after the resurrection as might be expected, the transmission of the message remained relevant throughout the years preceding the revolt.

In fact, there is internal evidence within the synoptics that suggests that the dating of at least some of the stories can be confidently assigned to the period leading to the crucifixion in 37 CE and immediately after, culminating in the writing of at least parts of Matthew sometime shortly after 39 CE. This dating (though much earlier than most scholars would care to accept), is significant in that it lays the foundation for understanding the true context of Jesus' message and helps to establish the correct chronological order in which the Gospels were written. Specifically, the story of the healing of the demoniac and the contiguous stories of the bleeding woman and the healing of Jairus' daughter seem to point to particular locations and a specific place in time, namely 36 CE. The fact that these stories in Mark and Luke contain specific reference to Jairus while the same story in Matthew does not, helps to determine the sequence of the stories and the intent of their message. This reference to Jairus is not casual or even historical but is an intentional metaphor for an actual historical person (Herod Antipas) whose inclusion in the first two stories carries

an importance politically and temporally that his inclusion in Matthew did not, hence the omission of the name Jairus in that Gospel. This suggests that the writing of the Gospel of Matthew, at least as concerns these stories, probably took place after 39 CE or after Antipas had been removed from power and was no longer a political entity that needed to be regarded.

With this understanding comes the realization that the true sequence of the synoptics is not Matthew, Mark and Luke as the traditionalists would have it, nor Mark, Matthew and Luke as modern scholarship would prefer but rather Mark, Luke and Matthew with Mark being written soon after Passover in 37 CE and Luke not long after that, between 37 and 39 CE (this dating for Luke is possibly corroborated by the dates when its intended recipient, Theophilus, was high priest, that is 37-41 CE) with Matthew, as stated above being penned sometime after Antipas' removal in 39 CE. Further corroboration of this sequencing comes in the form of additional internal evidence that has been largely ignored for two millennia, namely Jesus' baptism stories and the inclusion/exclusion of the name of the high priest, Caiaphas, who is named in Matthew and John but missing from Mark and Luke (there is a single mention of Caiaphas in Luke 3:2 but only as a means of affixing a time frame to the story that may be a later addition). These items contain information that indicates the sequence of their development. Whether or not the inclusion of this information was intentional or incidental is impossible to determine definitely, but the development of the individual items both separately and as a group, does seem to indicate a definitive progression that, like a botanical progression of seed to sprout to plant, seems to confirm the order of the writings.

The baptismal stories in the synoptics seem to trace a spiritual growth in the minds of later writers, a development of the grandeur and importance of the occasion with each successive retelling of the moment.

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Mark 1:10; “And when he came up out of the water immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit (*pneuma*) descending on him like a dove.”

Luke 3:21-22; “...and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the holy spirit (*hagion pneuma*) descended on him in bodily form like a dove...”

Matthew 3:16 “...and when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water and behold the heavens were opened to him and he saw the spirit of God (*pneumatou theou*) descending like a dove...”

The spiritual progression recorded in the development of the heavenly being in these three segments, from simple spirit in Mark, to the holy spirit in Luke, to the spirit of god in Matthew, seems to indicate the sequential order of the works as well. While Mosaeans of the First Century might be inclined to add or subtract the adjective *holy* to written material (although such a move would have been highly unlikely) it is even more unlikely that they would have tampered with any reference to *God* in any written work. In fact it was seen as a general rule in the *Halacha* or Mosaeian law of the time that one may increase in holiness but not decrease. In other words, if *God* was written in Matthew originally, Matthew then could not have preceded works that subsequently omitted *God* as Mark and Luke did. Once *God* was written into a work it could not be left out of following works that either copied or paraphrased the original. Mosaeian reverence for the divine figure of God was such that any written works that contained or might have contained any reference to God could not be purposely destroyed once they reached the end of their usefulness but were instead placed in *genizahs* or storage libraries where they were left to decompose naturally without human intervention. That same reverence would have dictated that if Matthew were the first of the Gospels to be written, Mark and Luke necessarily would have contained the God reference in their baptismal accounts. Since they do not, the supposition must be that they were written earlier than Matthew.

The inclusion/exclusion of Caiaphas in the Gospels parallels that of the use of Jairus, absent from the stories when its inclusion would have been politically disadvantageous (because he was still in power) and included in the stories later, after he was removed from power in 37 CE. Just as the omission of Jairus/Antipas in Matthew after 39 CE makes it clear that the political climate had changed enough to make the connection between Jairus and Antipas unnecessary, so too the dramatic changes that occurred in 37 CE allowed the inclusion of Caiaphas in the next Gospel to be written, which was Matthew. In Mark and Luke, Caiaphas is simply referred to as ‘the high priest’, an attempt to distance the real man, however slightly, from the consequences of what would have appeared to the Romans as a botched crucifixion of a Judean citizen. The writers of Mark and Luke, recording events so closely after they happened, hardly could have been expected to specifically name outright the man who had been in charge at the time when Jesus faked his death and rose from his grave. Caiaphas, though no longer high priest when these Gospels were written, must have retained friends in high places and had relatives in the area who would have come under some scrutiny and certainly derision for his part in the mess and while the Romans certainly knew Caiaphas and must have been suspicious of him as the Mosaeon high priest and his part in the fiasco of Jesus’ crucifixion, the direct inclusion of his name in the written Gospels could have served only to inflame Roman reaction to unresolved events and to those Mosaeans then in power. Sometime later, after Caiaphas had been removed from power or perhaps had died, his name was included in the story as a means of confirming the Gospel’s historical veracity by association.

With these progressions in mind, it seems clear that while Luke may have preceded Mark and Matthew or Mark may have preceded Luke and Matthew it is extremely unlikely that Matthew, or at least this baptismal story in Matthew, could have preceded either of the baptismal stories in Mark and Luke. Their writers would not have omitted Matthew’s reference to God had Matthew been written first. The most likely sequence seems to be then Mark, Luke and Matthew, corresponding more closely to the progression of the political intent

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evident in the story of Jairus' daughter; Mark and Luke being written pre-39 CE with Matthew written post-39 CE. The Gospel of John, written somewhat later, (probably between 40 and 68 CE) did not mention God in its baptismal account but used rather the simple 'spirit' or '*pneuma*' of Mark but John was a separate document from the synoptics, not so dependent upon them and reflecting, in a sense, a shift to a second phase of the revolutionary movement begun by Jesus. The political nature of all the Gospels, the revolutionary message imbedded within their stories, indicates that all four were in circulation before the First Jewish Revolt, or sometime before 66 CE when such a revolutionary message still had relevance. The synoptics, written close together in time and more highly dependent upon one another, reflected subtle changes in the political landscape of their times. John, written later, reflects a greater change within the movement, one affected by the loss of Jesus' direct public involvement and the intrusion of Pauline Christianity that usurped the original political message and altered it to the peaceful theological message that we know today.

The understanding that much of the material of the four Gospels was written between the 30s and 60s and the realization that their core message was political in nature, not spiritual, is a big step towards finding the Jesus of history. Once we can see his message for what it was, it becomes that much easier to see Jesus for who he was and to accept that much of what was written in the Gospels was based on disguising the political subversion that Jesus preached and protecting the individuals involved. For these reasons, the historical validity of any Gospel account must be weighed very carefully. Is it safe to assume the validity of Jesus' poverty or his Nazareth home, or could these be misrepresentations designed to confuse or mislead the Roman authorities? If euphemistic nicknaming as a means of misdirection and obfuscation was commonplace within the society of the time and specifically within the Dead Sea Scrolls, could the same be true of names within the Gospels? These questions require anyone searching for the historical Jesus to assume nothing and to be open-minded enough to scrutinize all other alternatives. If the Gospels present certain events as factual, one must assume for the sake of reliable research that

they might be metaphorical. If an incident seems inconsequential (the taste of gall, perhaps) one should consider that there might have been greater significance attached to it within the story. The point to remember is that the Gospels are not what they seem to be, even after centuries of dissection and interpretation, but they can be read and understood as the story of Jesus the Nazarene if they are framed within the dangers and oppression so prevalent at the time. To ignore or minimize this fact is to be unable to read and ascertain the real story they represent.

The inner core of the Gospels, the parables, miracles and teachings of Jesus that date from the late 20s to the 30s and beyond (before any redactions or schismatic biases were written into them) were written to hide their true message. Consequently, they were written using three levels of meaning that can be understood as: 1) the given anecdote (the parable, miracle/healing or observation) that is to be taken at face value with no interpretation; 2) the individual/spiritual/enlightenment level which requires a certain philosophical interpretation and served primarily to obscure the true message and 3) the political/social/nationalistic level that requires the deepest understanding of context for interpretation. This third level (and it runs through nearly all of the teachings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels) concerns almost exclusively his agenda for reunifying the United Monarchy of Israel from King David's time as a means of securing God's forgiveness of sin for the Mosaeon people and ultimately re-establishing God's kingdom (the United Monarchy) on earth. Once re-established, the Kingdom, whether through God's agency or the newfound strength of a repentant, unified and united people, would drive any oppressors from the lands of Israel.

A prime example of this layering is clear in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well that is found in John 4:1-42. The first layer, the basic story of Jesus coming upon a Samaritan woman about to get water from Jacob's well and talking with her about her past marital life and about the "water of life" he offers to those who receive his message, seems straight forward enough in our time, yet it would

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have been a very shocking story to listeners of first century Palestine. The idea that a woman, especially alone, would have spoken to any man who was not a close relative of hers would have been unthinkable, even scandalous. That Jesus, a Judean, (as evidenced by her remark in 4:9 that he is a “Jew” though actually, as indicated above, “Judean” is meant) would have spoken to a hated Samaritan, whether male or female, would have been equally shocking considering the animosity that existed between the two peoples. That he would have identified himself as the Messiah to a Samaritan who was expecting her own “Samaritan” messiah would be troubling to both Samaritans and Judeans, and that a Judean would have known anything at all about the past of a Samaritan woman would have seemed highly unusual to say the least. So the basic story, the first layer, while unremarkable to us would have been shocking, even agitating, to First Century Palestine listeners.

The second layer, the individual/spiritual/enlightenment message of the story would have required only a brief explanation for First Century listeners, as it would today. The spiritual message was relatively simple, Jesus was the Messiah, the chosen one of God, and if he was prepared to minister to someone like the Samaritan woman, a pariah to a Judean, a social outcast because of her accessibility to a strange man, an enemy to the Temple in Jerusalem because of her birthplace, then the listener, as a believer in Jesus, should be ready to accept such people as well. If Jesus was prepared to share the gift of the water of eternal life with this Samaritan woman, then all people and peoples must be important to God and therefore worthy of ministry. If Jesus, as a Judean, was prepared to accept the role of the Samaritan Messiah, then the messiah must be universal, must be the messiah for all people and all nations. Acceptance is the key to this message, and a willingness to avoid prejudging people, so that listeners will embrace those whom they might first shun. A very common, even characteristic, message in Jesus’ ministry, made clear with only the simplest of explanations but it is when we examine the third layer of the message that the true meaning of what Jesus was saying becomes clear.

The social/political/nationalistic message of this story really epitomizes the thrust of Jesus' original ministry as a political movement, which is why it serves as such a good example from the Gospels. As has been stated, though this political agenda runs through much, if not all, of what Jesus taught, it is most readily accessed here, in this story. The key to that access comes in the conversational reference to the Samaritan woman's five husbands. It was an awkward moment between Jesus and the woman, an intimate awareness on his part of what she no doubt considered to be an unsavory or at least unfortunate aspect of her life, and yet she was both surprised and impressed by his knowledge of her background. Why should she feel so and why did Jesus make the reference at all? Surely her character had been well established in the story by the facts already mentioned, that she was a disgraced woman talking with a strange man and a Samaritan talking with a Judean. Did her character need to be impugned further by the references to her multiple husbands and her current, unmarried but attached state to press home the message? It is in the understanding of her "husbands" that the political message reveals itself.

Samaria, like the rest of the Palestine area, had known nothing but political turmoil and social unrest for centuries up to and including the First Century. The land and its people had been conquered and reconquered, occupied and reoccupied by foreign invaders and indigenous rulers alike so that a steady stream of heads of state had passed through leadership positions in Samaria. It is to this stream of rulers that Jesus refers when recalling the Samaritan woman's husbands. The Samaritan woman clearly stands for the province of Samaria and her "husbands" just as clearly stand for the last five rulers of the province of Samaria. They are: Hyrcanus II, who ruled from 63-40 BCE, Antigonus 40-37, Herod the Great 37-4, Herod Archelaus 4 BCE-6CE and upon his removal, Rome (the "husband" who, as a metaphor for a foreign power, could not be legitimately "married" to a Samaritan). The reason that the first four husbands were noted by Jesus is that they came to power after the Roman incursion of Palestine in 63 BCE and although they were all born in that region and were Mosaeans, they were all more or less subject rulers to Rome (Hyrcanus

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was in fact approved and placed into power by Rome and Archelaus was removed from power by Rome), thus reflecting Samaria's checkered political past.

Seen in this light, the story more clearly reveals its subject. Jesus, representing the Judeans, by pointing out the woman's checkered past is indicating his understanding of what Samaria has endured for nearly one hundred years (63 BCE-27 CE approx.) under Roman occupation. By accepting the role of the Samaritan Messiah, he is holding out a hand of unity and friendship to the Samaritan people. More than that, by asking her initially to get him a drink, he is asking the Samaritan people to help him, to join him politically, to reunify. Surprised by his request, she asks him (in 4:9) why a Judean would ask a Samaritan for a drink/help. Jesus answers by telling her that if she knew "the gift of God" (reunification of the United Monarchy of David, the Kingdom of God and Heaven so often referred to in the Gospels) that she would be asking him instead for a drink of the "living water", a reference to the "living water" of the Jordan river in contrast to the "dead" (not moving) water of Jacob's well. This mention of waters is a comment on the differences between past and future salvation, but more, it is a comment on the sectarianism that has prevented the needed reunification. Jacob's well lies in Samaria, on land given specifically to Jacob and his descendants, now exclusively Samaritan, whereas the Jordan, flowing as it does from north to south, physically touches all the lands of the United Monarchy; Samaria, Galilee, Judea, Perea, etc., free flowing, unaltered by man. The importance of this distinction would not have been too obscure for First Century listeners. They would have grasped the deeper meaning Jesus conveyed to them about leaving behind old prejudices, old faiths in order to secure the Kingdom of God, now, on earth.

He makes this specific point later (in 4: 21-23), when he declares to her that "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain (Gerizim, the holy mountain of the Samaritans and close to Jacob's well) nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father", a hint that a new, nonsectarian temple will be built after reunification, and though he underlines the

differences between the two peoples by indicating Judean priority in matters of faith, he also affirms that all “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” and not by sectarianism or geography. That the Samaritan woman understands this message is shown by the fact that she leaves her water jar behind (signaling that the old waters/ways are to be left behind) as she goes to her town to inform the people that she thinks she has met the Messiah.

This message of the actual reunification and restoration of the United Monarchy of David would have been seen by both the Roman and Jerusalem authorities as the highest form of insurrection and sedition, an obvious attempt to rouse the populace to rebellion, as Jesus and his listeners would have known. To be caught by the authorities preaching such a message would have meant instant arrest and execution, possibly for everyone involved, preachers and listeners alike. Under such circumstances, it doesn't require much imagination to realize that burying the intended message beneath a layer of more easily explained, conventional preaching was both prudent and expedient if the message was to be disseminated to the people. This then, is the story contained within the Gospels, a hidden political agenda obscured by the spiritual teachings of Jesus, a case of the second layer of meaning serving as plausible deniability if necessary to mask the intended message. In its time and place, that political message was as dangerous and deeply divisive as any subversive and seditious movement could be and yet it was also a message of hope and redemption for thousands of poor and disenfranchised people who longed for a better future. As we proceed to study the Jesus story, we will analyze other parables and healings that represent his political ambition, understanding for the first time what the Gospels meant and how they were altered after his crucifixion to adapt to a more spiritual and mythical agenda.

Another underlying facet incorporated within the Gospels that should be noted is their use of gender selection for various characters within the pericopes to differentiate between social- political entities. As a general rule, men and women represent specific cultural

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connections as a means of conveying secretly the messages of the stories. For example, women on the whole can be understood to stand for population groups (as the woman at Jacob's well stands for Samaria) or geographical locations (as can be seen in the raising of Jairus' daughter), while men represent institutional identities like the priesthood or government bodies (as can be seen in the Good Samaritan or the healing of the blind man at the Bethsaida pool). This usage of gender to represent different social segments was just another way for Jesus and the writers of the Gospels to again obscure the deeper political message they were preaching, yet at the same time these choices give us further insight into the depth of the chauvinism that existed at that time. Men were assigned to represent the higher institutions portrayed in the Gospels, the religious, legal and political aspects of the stories while women characters represented the lower order of things, the general populace and the social-political organizations that defined them. These assignments help to explain the seeming importance of women in Jesus' ministry contained within the Gospels. The importance of conveying the political message demanded that women be used metaphorically as places and groups to help the listeners grasp the deeper meanings in the stories as a means of clarification. If the story involved a man, his metaphorical role was as an institution. If a woman was the focal point, her metaphorical role was as a place or common social group. Jesus and the Gospel writers would have seen nothing wrong in these distinctions since the distinctions were simply reflections of their society that would have been accepted by one and all. Women may not have been trustworthy enough to give testimony in a court of law in Jesus' time, but they could certainly be used in a metaphorical way to represent significant aspects of a seditious message.

One more note requires attention although the recognition must be brief (there is hardly a chapter of this current work that doesn't deserve much lengthier attention). Some scholars today have proposed and supported the view that an historical Jesus never existed and that the Christ of faith is the result of the development of a mythic godhead by First Century Mosaeans intent upon creating a spiritual schism with the

Jerusalem Temple. These scholars, known generally as “ahistorists” have built a theory of the mythical Christ Jesus based primarily on two tenets, the first being the Argument from Silence, a position that states that because there are no unambiguous or unqualified references to Jesus written contemporaneously with his purported existence in the First Century that the likelihood of his actual, historical existence is greatly diminished, if not refuted out right. Since the references to Jesus in the works of Josephus and other First Century historians are of questionable authenticity, the ahistorists assume a skeptical view of the existence of the historical man. In their understanding of the extant sources, not enough is written about such a prophet and holy man and miracle worker to justify belief in his real existence. This view, coupled with the second tenet of their theory, the absence of any tangible biographical data about Jesus contained within the non Gospel writings of the New Testament (the Gospels being viewed as a later addition to the Jesus story in order to provide biographical substance to the fictive godhead), sundry other early church writings and the teachings of the early church fathers (Paul, et al) and the deification and mythologizing of the Christ of faith contained within those works, has lead the ahistorists to the conclusion that the Christ of faith is a totally fabricated and fictional character, a mythical founding father that served as a starting point for their mysticism and support for the belief that the historical Jesus had no basis in fact.

Again, without going into too much detail, it seems essential in this current work to make some response to the ahistorist theory, if only to remove it as a stumbling block in our search for the Jesus of history. While many of the ahistorical arguments are well reasoned and confirmed by the written record left to us and while, in part, the second tenet of their theory seems accurate and well corroborated, believable, and factual, the first tenet is less so. The argument from silence, while on its surface seems to be the stronger of the two tenets, upon closer analysis fails for several reasons. For one thing, the ahistorists, like many modern biblical scholars, take the Jesus story out of its context of first century Palestine. As we will see later, that context is foundational to the story, influencing what we know of the story and just as

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importantly, what we don't know or shouldn't know about it. The fact that the people of that time and place were continuously under the oppression of both their local leaders and those of a foreign power goes a long way to explaining the lack of documented evidence about Jesus. Add to that the fact that his message was largely political and seditious, highly controversial and extremely dangerous and it is not too hard to understand that the contemporaneous recording of any biographical details of his life and message would be necessarily irresponsible and risky. As Jesus himself says in Mark 4:11-12, "...but for those outside, everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive and may indeed hear but not understand lest they should turn and be forgiven." The nearest analogy that comes close to mirroring the dangers faced by Jesus and his earliest followers would be the underground fighters in Nazi occupied Europe during World War II. It would be hard to imagine that the French Underground would take both the time and the risks to document the life and political message of one of their leaders during their country's occupation without either encoding the information in some way or obscuring it beneath layers of metaphor and allegory, which, as noted above, is exactly what they did. Such an activity as openly recording the biographical details of a freedom fighter's life goes beyond reason considering the threat of capture or exposure of the documents. One of the essential differences between the French Underground and the Jesus movement lies in the fact that the Nazi occupation lasted less than a decade, while the Roman occupation of Palestine lasted for centuries, thus negating the chance for contemporaries of Jesus to go public with their stories for fear of retribution against other members of the movement or their families.

Beyond the omission of context and the inclusion of Jesus' political agenda, there are other factors that seem to refute the argument from silence as a qualified objection to an historical Jesus. As has been indicated in the Introduction, there are certain items and specific dates buried within the Gospels that would seem to indicate the existence of a real Jesus. It is hard to imagine that those who fabricated the mythic Jesus would include in their fiction references to specific subtle

markers that either historically date various incidents or suggest the presence of human rather than divine intervention. While it is understood that the creators of the myth wanted to ground its founder in a real, human setting, it is less easily understood why they would depend on such subtle markers to do so. Why not be specific and obvious in indicating the historical context of the myth? Why not ground the myth with greater historical certainty, a less ambiguous date of birth perhaps, a more historically accurate marker than “around thirty” for the beginning of his ministry? There were better and more tangible ways to ground the mythic Jesus in his society than were used in the Gospels (the documents that most ahistorists point to as an attempt by early writers to ground the mythic Christ in reality), and while the argument might be made that the ambiguity of his biography was an important facet of the fiction, allowing wider interpretation and acceptance of the man while at the same time interfering with any real attempt to recover any facts of his non-existent life, that seems a fairly tenuous and risky approach to developing the myth. There would have been too many reasons for actual, living people to refute the myth and decry the deception.

What seems to exist within the Jesus story is a profound dichotomy, an un-resolvable gulf between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, and while the ahistorists are satisfied that their Christ of faith is only a myth, hiding their embarrassment over a real Jesus of history behind their Argument from Silence, what they fail to realize is that the two are mutually exclusive. The Jesus of history does not need to impinge on the Christ of faith to secure his existence, and the myth of the Christ of faith doesn't require an historical Jesus to be believable. The Jesus of history can exist without becoming the Christ of faith and the Christ of faith can exist without the grounding of an historical Jesus. Christian apologists, on the other hand, will denounce such a dichotomy as unhistorical, untraditional and completely fictive, another extreme interpretation not supported by the written record but that is an argument from desire and not from fact. The written record, especially the Gospels, has been open to interpretation from the earliest writings and continues to be interpreted to this day. What the dichotomy

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interpretation lacks is the sanctification accorded to most Christian interpretations by Christian apologists, beyond that, it has as much credibility as any other biblical interpretation.

MIRACLES

As presented in the Gospels, the miracles attributed to Jesus are a profound statement of his divinity and the uniqueness of his identity, a calling card as it were, introducing him as both god and savior. They define him in his role as Messiah, a man of special abilities and great power whom God has placed within the Mosaeen community to right the spiritual ship of the people and prepare them for the coming Kingdom of God. Without the ability to perform these miracles, without the extra-human gift associated with the capability of accomplishing what Webster's Dictionary defines as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs", Jesus becomes little more than a rabbi of the First Century, a teacher of profound but not unique truths, an itinerant teacher, a socio-political agitator. The miracles, especially the resurrection, are a cornerstone of the Christian faith, foundational references to occurrences upon which the entire belief system rests and without which the divinity of Jesus falls into serious and irrevocable doubt. That the faithful who support and reinforce Christian tradition are reluctant to thoroughly examine these events is hardly surprising given the potential risks for exposing Jesus as less than divine. Nevertheless, and as heretical as it may seem, the miracles associated with Jesus should be re-examined with a critical eye and, in light of his political aims, in the context of his times.

Examples abound of Christian apologists either glossing over the topic entirely, knowingly or unknowingly disregarding pertinent facts and clear cut cases of obvious magic, or of viewing the subject so esoterically that they transform the study from a practical examination of the actual miracle stories ascribed to Jesus into a philosophical dialogue about the dynamics of belief in miracles in First Century Palestine and throughout history. Such casual, nuanced or deceptive handling of such an important topic can only lead to one of two

conclusions: that Christian apologists, bible scholars and historians are afflicted with the ignorance of blind faith or they are consciously trying to obscure the truth. A quote from Christian illusionist Brock Gill captures the current Christian attitude towards Jesus' miracles precisely: "Yes, it is possible for modern day magicians to imitate Jesus' miracles but only by using high tech equipment and advanced scientific knowledge... all of which were unavailable during Jesus' time. How was Jesus able to perform them? Only someone with God's power can do such things," (from the DVD *Miracles of Jesus* by Brock Gill). Such a naive approach to this subject, especially by someone promoting a Christian agenda, is endemic in Jesus studies and shows the cultural egotism that hampers the search for the historical man. Just because Jesus lived two thousand years ago does not automatically guarantee that the culture of the time was any less sophisticated in their thinking or their approach to life and certain technologies were in fact available to Jesus that aided him in performing his miracles along with scientific knowledge in the form of botanical knowledge that was also available. Some of the miracles were accomplished by basic tricks using age-old magic fundamentals like slight of hand and misdirection, and some were not miracles or magic at all, but were simply staged events meant to convey miraculous power.

Another interpretation suggested by many scholars is to discredit the miracles by claiming that they are merely the attempt by the Gospel writers to incorporate Old Testament events into the story of Jesus, a continuum of miracles, as it were, that link Jesus with the biblical past. The idea that the miracles of Jesus had precedence in Old Testament miracles is not new and certainly the association of many of his miracles with events and miracles from the biblical past is obvious and obviously purposeful and meant to increase his significance and stature with his audience. They serve as a double affirmation of his divine existence; the miracles themselves as actual events that people witnessed and the miracles as echoes of the Old Testament prophets. As many scholars have noted, many of Jesus' miracles seem to be drawn from the Elijah-Elisha cycle of the Old Testament and therefore should not be assumed to be original events in his life. The problem

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with the fundamental argument of those scholars, that the Gospel miracles represent a fictional construct based solely upon Old Testament stories and are therefore nothing but fiction is twofold: the motives of the Gospel writers can never be ascertained; did they create the miracle stories as a completely fictive attempt at elevating Jesus to the level of Old Testament prophets or did Jesus knowingly set up and perform miracles based upon the Old Testament examples in order to impress his audience and position himself as an equal to Old Testament prophets? Secondly, the inherent political messages of some of the miracles would seem to argue against a strictly Old Testament connection and would seem to indicate a conscious effort on Jesus' part to incorporate an Old Testament connection in order to strengthen his message. Just as modern politicians often point to politically relevant predecessors in order to strengthen their positions and policies, so too, Jesus may have encouraged his own connection to past prophets by duplicating certain of their miracles in order to confirm his righteousness and to strengthen his political position. That the Gospels record these events as divine miracles again simply speaks to the need of Jesus and his followers to obscure the real message and to promote the messenger. With that in mind, it is necessary to re-examine several of Jesus' miracles to determine their actual meaning, and while they may be referred to as miracles, there is much more of magic and metaphor at their core than divine intervention.

The miracles of Jesus, whether they are healings or restorations to life or mass feedings or turning water into wine, fall roughly into three categories: magic, pseudo miracles and metaphors, each one serving an important function of his ministry. Sometimes, these categories may overlap in one event, as when a show of magic as a means of inspiring awe may also carry a deeper message through metaphor, but almost invariably each miracle event can be recognized as fitting one of the three categories. Jesus manipulated these events in order to both bolster his credibility as a "doer of wonderful deeds" and to advance his political agenda. Gender roles, as mentioned above, can be used to determine underlying content, as can names, ages, time spans and Old Testament coincidence. These factors help to establish in some cases

the specific time frame of the message/event within a few years, while in other cases they simply serve to send the message. In some cases the interpretation required to fully understand the individual message may be lost to us, as Jesus' teachings were very much time and place specific and many of the contemporary references that he would have used with his audience have been lost or are too vague to establish their true meaning. Enough are left, however, to clearly grasp the underlying meaning in many of his miracles. In a few cases, the focus of the event is so specific that it leaves little doubt about the human agency involved with its operation, making it obvious that these events are marked by the touch of a human, not divine, hand and that they are from a specific time and place, thereby lending considerable weight to the idea of a real, historical individual.

The first and most obviously manipulated 'miraculous' event that needs to be re-examined is Jesus turning water to wine at the marriage in Cana. It is, along with the feedings of the masses, one of the best known of Jesus' miracles and is, perhaps, the single most important of the miracles performed by Jesus in that it establishes his divine power very early in his ministry according to the Gospel of John (the story is absent from the Synoptics). It is an iconic event and is seen as one of the seven miraculous 'signs' by which Jesus' divine nature is confirmed. Because the miracle took place at a marriage feast, the event is often put forward as confirmation that Jesus was married (various intrinsic items being taken as indicators that Jesus was the groom), though this analysis is tentative at best (Jesus leaves his own wedding, apparently with only his disciples, to continue teaching elsewhere). The location of the historical (traditional) Cana, like Nazareth, is also speculative and therefore tentative, with several possible archaeological sites proposed (archaeology can neither confirm nor deny any of the sites as being the Gospel Cana), though tradition accepts that the town existed and was a real, geographical location. What are of primary interest, however, are the stone jars that held the water and the wine. Understanding the jars will help to clarify the intention of the pericope, will help to decipher the metaphor behind the 'miracle' and will help to resolve the question of divine intervention.

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According to John 2:6, "...there were six stone jars there for the Judean rites of purification each holding twenty or thirty gallons." Aside from the large capacity of water the stone jars represented (a maximum of 180 gallons), it is important to note that they were made of stone. Due to Mosaeon purity rites, stone was the only material suitable in which to store the water necessary for the rites. Unlike clay jars or animal skins or other vessels, which might absorb a measure of whatever liquid was kept in them, stone was considered to be impervious to cross contamination, so that the water kept in stone jars maintained its purity. As a result, however, stone jars, in comparison to other vessels, were difficult and time consuming to produce. Clay vessels could be formed by hand and animal skins could be sewn into shape, but stone jars had to be shaped and finished slowly, laboriously and often on a lathe. Because they were somewhat labor intensive to manufacture, they would have been costly to produce and own. Six of the jars would have represented no small investment, especially large jars like the ones in John's account and jars like that, configured to turn water into wine would have been more costly still to make because they required extra work and special knowledge. Their appearance might have been different from other stone jars of the time, perhaps incorporating large handles and some form of spout and internally they would have been much different, bisected down the middle making two separate chambers. No doubt, once they were used to turn water into wine, they would have been taken away secretly and destroyed to preserve the nature of the 'miracle'. The Cana jars are known today as Heron's amphora and they were designed two thousand years ago as a simple magic trick.

Heron (or Hero) of Alexandria was a Greek mathematician, engineer and hydrologist who lived in the Egyptian city of Alexandria during the early part of the First Century C.E. The exact years of his birth and death are unknown, but it is thought by historians that he was active during the years 10-70 C.E. or very nearly contemporary to Jesus. He is credited with inventing the first steam engine, the *aeolipile*; the first coin operated vending machine for use in a temple and the wind wheel, the first wind-powered machine. It is difficult to be exact

in his biography because very little material exists recording the specifics of his life. What is known of him primarily comes to us second hand from other sources that referred to his work that was copied from ancient texts since lost, that contained his notes on various subjects and inventions. It is known through such sources that he had designed cleverly engineered amphora that allowed either of two fluids to flow by occluding or opening hidden holes; Heron's amphora [See Fig. 1]. Whether or not he was the first to invent the trick amphora or whether he merely was the first to record and develop an existing technology and so lay claim to it is unclear. What is important to note is that the knowledge and technology necessary to create the trick amphora was available in Jesus' time [See Fig. 2&3]. Not only was such information available during Jesus' life, but he and Joseph would have had access to it in Alexandria, the largest Mosaeon community of the First Century, when they traveled to Egypt.

That Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt is recorded in the Gospels, although their reasons for the trip may have been clouded by the Gospel accounts blaming Herod the Great and Herod Archelaus for their departure, return and subsequent move to Galilee. What is not recorded is where in Egypt they went or how long they stayed. The Gospel accounts seem to indicate that the family left Bethlehem shortly after Jesus' birth that would have been in 6 B.C.E., although a date of 4 B.C.E. is not out of the question based upon the death of Herod. Also, their return, based upon Herod's death, may have been as early as 4 B.C.E. or soon after and their move to Galilee based upon Archelaus' ascension to his father's throne might similarly have taken place early, in 4 or 5 B.C.E. However, it seems unrealistic to assume that a young family burdened by poverty would make the lengthy walking trip to Egypt, back and forth in so short a period of time. The presence of Archelaus as ruler of Judea from 4 B.C.E. to 6 C.E., the mitigating situation that directed the move to Galilee, could be construed to imply that the family's return might have taken place at any time during those ten years. Regardless, the dearth of information about Jesus' childhood allows for the fact that the family may have spent a considerable time in Egypt, certainly long enough to become acquainted with two of the

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main centers of learning and healing in the ancient world; the library at Alexandria and the nearby Lake Mareotis, the enclave of the Therapeutae, a Mosaeen sect somewhat like the Essenes.

What is of interest is that given the Gospel reference to Egypt, Joseph and Jesus as a young child, were physically in Egypt at a time when Heron might have been constructing his amphora, and even if Jesus was too young to learn anything substantial, Joseph certainly was not and could easily have been exposed to the trick of the miracle amphora, knowledge that at a later date he could have presented to an older Jesus. Even if Joseph and Jesus preceded Heron in Egypt by a number of years, it is still within reason to assume that they found access to the knowledge of the amphora through other means, before Heron laid claim to an existing technology. Likewise, Joseph's exposure to the extensive knowledge of drugs, medicinal plants and cures of the Therapeutae, who were considered to be some of the finest physicians of their time, was literally only a stone's throw from Alexandria at Lake Mareotis, the two separated by a mere sliver of land. Although ancient sources are not specific about the location of the Therapeutae encampment at Lake Mareotis, it was no doubt in close proximity to the Mosaeen population in Alexandria, or at the very least, in close enough proximity as to make convenient accessibility reasonable. The accessibility to these stores of knowledge would have presented a profound opportunity for Joseph to learn and develop the abilities necessary to both train and aid Jesus in their attempt to restore the United Monarchy of David, and since the family was not poverty stricken but of royal and priestly lineage they would have had the means to acquire whatever knowledge they sought through the help of tutors and specialists.

Given that Joseph and later Jesus had access to this technology, it is not hard to accept that they put their knowledge to good use as Jesus came of age and began to assume a leadership role in those groups, primarily the Zealots, who were dedicated to restoring national self determination and ridding their country of foreign invaders. As a first step in such a process, Jesus would have needed to establish himself not

only as a righteous individual but as a man of great power and even divine selection, a man, not only qualified through birth right and ancestry to lead the Mosaeon people but also one anointed or chosen by God to lead a fiercely nationalistic movement. The fastest, simplest way to achieve such recognition would be for him to perform miracles, acts of seemingly divine intervention that would cause the people, especially those involved in the Zealot movement, to take notice. Turning water into wine was, with the doctored stone jars, a simple and effective way to perform such a miracle, although the setting for the miracle was far from a marriage feast in a small town in Galilee; it was a gathering of Zealot leaders.

The metaphor of a marriage served once again to hide the truth from the uninitiated yet allowed those people in the know to understand what had taken place. As mentioned earlier with the multiple marriages of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, marriages in the Gospels often stood as metaphors for political leadership roles. The marriage at Cana was such a metaphor, proposing as it did the ascension of Jesus to the role of leader of the Zealots. One of the reasons he is often suspected of being the bridegroom in this story is because he is in control of events that as a mere guest he would not have controlled (his control over the steward and those servers handling the water jars), but the truth is that he was in control of those aspects of the ceremony because he was controlling the performance of the magic trick in order to impress the Zealot leaders. It is important to remember that Cana, like Simon the Canaanite or Zealotes or Kanaanean, was another form of the word for Zealot, a sort of shorthand that would have been understood by the initiated to represent the movement and not some small town. The marriage at Cana then becomes the election of a Zealot political leader. Since Jesus is presented as being in control of some of the proceedings, it must be assumed that the election refers to him. That his mother is present and directs him to perform the miracle indicates her support, as the genealogical link to the Davidic line, for his ascension, a role no peasant woman from Nazareth could have hoped to assume. It is only Mary's royal lineage and consequently Jesus' that allows them to

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assume their positions of control within the ceremony and subsequently Jesus' leadership of the Zealot movement.

The Gospel story does not indicate the size of the metaphorical wedding or how long it lasted (traditional Jewish weddings can last for a week) so it is difficult to determine the number of people involved. The total volume of water and wine necessary to fill the stone jars would seem to indicate that there were many people in attendance. Six stone jars with a possible maximum capacity of 180 gallons of water would imply that the jars were for use by a single wealthy household, were gathered from individual residences or were either brought to Cana specifically for the marriage feast. Each jar probably stood about three and a half feet high (similar stone jars of the First Century found in the ruins of the 'Burnt House' in Jerusalem with smaller capacities of only seventeen gallons stood at two to two and a half feet tall) and might have weighed well over one hundred pounds empty. The weight of water is eight pounds per gallon, so that the jars when full would have had an extra 240 pounds added to their dry weight for a possible total of nearly 400 pounds each. These were not vessels that could be moved or tipped easily. The volume of wine necessary to perform the trick would have been half the volume of the jars, 90 gallons total or 15 gallons per jar, a substantial quantity that would have rendered 1,920 6oz. portions (or 2,880 4oz. portions) and this volume would have been in addition to the wine already consumed at the feast. Even if the marriage feast lasted many days, the number of guests must have been quite large to require that much wine, perhaps more than the entire population of a small town like the traditional Cana.

An interesting and important insight into this story is the greater understanding it gives as to the nature and depth of the organization that Jesus had at his disposal. Far from being a rustic carpenter from Galilee, Jesus' ability to plan, set up and perform the trick of turning water into wine shows him to be an individual who was well supported both financially and physically. A poor rabbi from Galilee could hardly have had the means to manufacture six expensive stone jars or afford the manpower to transport and oversee them or the wine to fill them. It

either took a fair investment of money or the dedicated assistance of political followers or both to set up and perform this trick. Jesus could not have done it alone. A group of well-organized and extremely loyal followers must have worked behind the scenes to enable Jesus to turn water into wine and then destroy any evidence of the trick. The fact that Jesus rose to the prominence that he did indicates that those people working behind the scenes were accomplished at their tasks. No one ever spoke of the deception, no one discovered the trick, and no one stopped Jesus' rise to power by claiming fraud. Money may have bought cooperation and probably did, at least as far as the manufacture of the stone jars and the purchase of the wine was concerned, but only a shared dedication to a political view could have bought lasting silence. The trick became a miracle.

Could the story be nothing more than metaphor or myth? Could it truly be a miracle? Perhaps, but several things stand out that seem to indicate otherwise. It is hard to imagine that a completely fictitious, mythic or miracle event such as this would incorporate into its story something as prosaic and human as a magic trick to promote its main character's abilities. If it is important to proclaim the miraculous capabilities of Jesus within a gospel why settle creatively for turning water into wine? Why not have him perform something really awe inspiring or profound, like parting the Red Sea or moving a mountain? This same argument can be applied to many of his 'miracles'. They are, in a sense, mundane, earth bound and easily explained, certainly not beyond human understanding or machinations or the divine interventions into human affairs. If an all knowing God chose to have Jesus turn water into wine in an attempt to announce His earthly presence, wouldn't that God have been aware of Heron's amphora too, and wouldn't that knowledge have suggested that perhaps a greater, less suspect miracle was called for? In other words, why would God choose to perform a miracle that could so easily be duplicated by a simple trick? Doesn't the very nature of a miracle presuppose that it cannot be a trick or of human intervention, throughout eternity? Is there ever a statute of limitations on God's miracles that they remain miraculous even past the point where human knowledge and

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technology can simulate the same miracle? Is a miracle of the First Century still a miracle if we humans can perform the same feat in the Twenty First Century? As long as the physics of fluid dynamics makes Heron's amphora work, the ability to seemingly turn water into wine ceases to be a miracle. Jesus needed to perform a magic trick in order to impress the witnesses with his extraordinary powers. To suggest that he performed a miracle in Cana is to choose to ignore the very real possibility that he was aware of the technology that made such a feat a practical reality.

While the trick of turning water into wine should no longer be viewed unquestionably as a miracle, it does help to establish Jesus as a real, historical figure. As mentioned, the idea that the writer of John's Gospel would have chosen a fictitious event of such obvious human agency to present as the first wondrous sign of the coming Messiah seems to be a case of damning with faint praise. The miracle does not rise to the occasion; it is insufficient for its intended purpose and creatively vapid unless, of course, the miracle actually took place. The fact that the event was recorded by a Gospel writer suggests that, far from a failure of creative hyperbole, he was writing about an event that actually had happened. The event may have been recorded through metaphor in order to disguise its real intent, but the core of the story, the magic trick that is the foundation, must have occurred in real life. Put simply, if the episode was nothing more than an exercise in creative writing, why not choose something grander, more attention grabbing? By choosing to record a very human magic trick as miracle, the writer stepped away from creativity and wrote about a real event. Whether or not he incorporated the story from another source not associated with Jesus, from the life of some other miracle worker perhaps, or from some other written account of magic and cobbled it to his gospel about Jesus seems unlikely. That approach might have opened Jesus up to the charge of being just another miracle worker performing the same type of miracle others had performed and therefore hardly demonstrative of his divine uniqueness. Precisely because the 'miracle' is so pedestrian and so easily accomplished by human hands it seems to verify that it

must have been an actual event, a trick that a real, flesh and blood Jesus could have performed.

It is possible, of course, that the entire episode is metaphor, that beyond the Cana/Zealot, marriage/ leadership metaphors used to convey the necessary political message, the water to wine trick was also a metaphor representing, as in the parable of new wine into old skins, that there is a change coming and that the old laws regarding purification are to be supplanted by a new code and that consecration with Jesus' miracle wine will supersede traditional purification with water. Such a metaphor would be in keeping with Jesus' lessons about changes in food purity rites and the need to disregard the dietary injunctions that the Mosaeans insisted would protect one from defilement. Certainly, changing water into wine falls into that category of metaphor. The problem with this view is that nearly all of the incidents in the Gospels can be placed in the same category, metaphor as reality, ultimately concluding with an imaginary Jesus and Gospels that are entirely fiction. The question then becomes, would people change their lives, and ultimately their behavior, based upon a work of fiction? As we have seen above and will continue to see throughout this work, there are many historical markers such as dates and historical personages buried within the metaphors that point to a real Jesus of the First Century. Just as nuclear physicists look for sub-atomic particles by looking for the path they have left behind, so too, when searching for the historical Jesus it is the evidence of his path, his impact on the people and the subtle shifts in the careers and politics of those around him that help to define his existence. The simple truth of a magic trick may be one of those markers.

One miracle story that is entirely metaphorical and consequently never happened is the feeding of the five thousand found in all four of the Gospels (Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17, Matthew 14:13-21 and John 6:5-15). It is the only miracle story other than the resurrection that is found in all four Gospels, and as a result seems to carry a special significance. Scholars have debated the reality of this episode and the similar miracle of the feeding of the four thousand and the real meaning

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of their intended messages. Numbers play a large part in understanding these metaphorical stories. Five thousand and four thousand, five loaves of bread and two fish, seven loaves and some small fish, twelve baskets and seven baskets of crumbs, groups of hundreds and fifties, all these numerical references have meaning and importance. Interpretations of these miracles are varied and not particularly conclusive in their views, ranging as they do from the traditional view of an actual miracle where Jesus manages to feed thousands of people with a scant amount of food, to biblical allusions of other feedings, to the suggestion that the crowds were subjected to mass hypnosis and were deluded into thinking that they had been fed, to various theological and religious metaphors that indicated the rise of Christianity and its ultimate supremacy over Judaism. These conclusions are vague and heavily influenced by the traditional view of Jesus and situate the miracles in the early Christian development period. However, when these stories are placed within their proper time and place (the mid thirties of the Common Era in Palestine before the advent of Christianity), and when they are evaluated within the proper context (the Mosaeon nationalistic movement) they can be seen for what they are; communications that were meant to be disseminated across the land that delineated the structure and provenance of the military forces required by the nationalistic leaders, namely Jesus and the Zealots.

As in any culture that regards the accurate transmission of information to be essential to its well being, the memorization of facts is problematic, especially in those societies where the technology to record and share information is crude or non-existent as in Palestine of the First Century. The precise preservation of common history, genealogy, even simple record keeping in predominately oral cultures is dependent upon linguistic solutions to the pedantic rules of rote memorization. Although the Torah had been effectively handed down for generations through strictly oral transmission, information of a more immediate and temporal nature required other methods to insure its accurate communication. Just as nursery rhymes have recorded historical catastrophes (“Ring Around the Rosies” memorialized the

Black Plague) and poems have helped in recalling dates of significance (“In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue...”) and simple stories have preserved, through metaphor, essential, singular qualities (George Washington chopping down the cherry tree), the miracle stories of the mass feedings were designed to impart important information in a form that was easy to convey and to retain. They were also presented in a manner that hid the truth without being so obscure as to become lost in transmission. These stories were the keys to informing the general population about the military dispositions for the upcoming rebellion, where the troops were coming from, how they would be organized, how many could be expected. In effect, the stories were communiqués dictating the order of battle and Jesus, as the leader of the Zealot movement, was putting out a call to arms in response to his call for rebellion, “Talitha cumi! I say to you, rise up!”

In Mark and Matthew both feedings are recorded, while in Luke and John only the feeding of the five thousand is recorded. The uncertainty by many scholars over the inclusion of two seemingly identical miracles in Mark and Matthew with seemingly only minor changes disappears once their true purpose is seen. Both stories are necessary to fully understand the scope of what Jesus was trying to accomplish, and both stories, though separated within Mark and Matthew by other pericopes are really two parts of one whole. In Mark the feedings take place; after Jesus heals Jairus’ daughter (the call for rebellion), after Jesus is rejected in his home town (rejection of the United Monarchy by Jerusalem leaders), and after the death of John the Baptist (the second Messiah and co- leader of the rebellion), all signs that events are coming to a crisis. Also in Mark, the feeding of the four thousand takes place; after Jesus heals a deaf man in Decapolis (conversion of the Hellenized Mosaeans beyond the Jordan to the idea of the United Monarchy and the rebellion), and after Jesus accepts the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman (conversion to the idea of the rebellion by the Phoenicians). As will be seen, the positioning of these pericopes prior to the miracle feedings are not accidental but are meant to help explain and reinforce the intention of the metaphors and the inclusion of the pericopes about non-Mosaeans peoples and

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Hellenized Mosaeans used as precursors to the miracles very clearly designated certain geographical boundaries. It is important to remember that Jesus' first priority was not necessarily rebellion. His first priority was to re-establish the United Monarchy of David and Solomon. From that, rebellion and subsequently the defeat of the Romans would follow with God's help.

Re-establishing the United Monarchy meant re-establishing its geographical boundaries and incorporating all the peoples within those boundaries into a united and unified whole; a nation. Of all the stories within the Gospels, none show Jesus' attempt at reunification quite as clearly as the feeding miracles. Other stories speak to his attempts to seek unity between individual provinces and peoples, but the feeding miracles are the only ones that show his broad based efforts to include all the provinces and all the peoples that had originally made up the United Monarchy. This is shown clearly in the metaphor of the bread and fish, the five loaves of bread representing the five provinces extant during Jesus' time (Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Perea and Galilee) that geographically made up a large part of the territory of David's Kingdom and the bread a metaphor for David, born in the city of Bethlehem or 'the house of bread'. The two fish represent those areas or city states not intrinsic parts of the original kingdom but contiguous to its borders (Tyre and Sidon) during Jesus' time, identifying them as coastal locations against the Mediterranean Sea. The remaining lands of David's, and later Solomon's kingdom, those lands to the east of the Jordan River and Perea and to the north of Galilee (comprising what became Herod Philip's tetrarchy during Jesus' life), were accounted for in the feeding of the four thousand where the seven loaves of bread (David's Kingdom) and some small fish represented the seven provinces (Decapolis, Auranitis, Batanea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Iturea and Abilene) and some small city states around the Sea of Galilee, probably Hippos, Gadara and Bethsaida. The land areas represented by all these various provinces and city-states, metaphorically represented by bread and fish, more than cover those same land areas that made up David and Solomon's kingdom that was the United Kingdom (see Fig. 5).

The idea that the metaphorical ‘bread and fish’ represented the geo-political divisions of the various provinces in Palestine at that time is demonstrated very subtly by a seemingly minor word choice between the two feedings. In the feeding of the five thousand, the Greek word used for basket is *kophinos*, which describes a small, wicker basket used by the Mosaeans for general purposes. In the feeding of the four thousand, however, the Greek word for basket becomes *spuris*, which describes a small, reed basket used by Greek speaking Mosaeans and Gentiles, also for general purposes. The difference between these two words of similar meaning is telling. In the miracle of the five thousand, designed to communicate to the Mosaeans of the five traditional Mosaeian provinces, a Greek word of Mosaeian etymology was used, while in the miracle of the four thousand, designed to communicate to those Hellenized Mosaeans living in the largely Greek speaking seven provinces, a Greek word of Greek etymology was used. This word choice is explicit in Mark 8:19-20; “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many baskets (*kophinos*) full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him “Twelve” “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets (*spuris*) full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him “Seven.” This subtle marker was purposefully left in to make a distinction between the two stories and between the two regions. Their inclusions were based upon the geographically separate audiences’ familiarity with the different baskets and to reinforce the distinction between the very similar stories.

The difference between the numbers of men being fed, four and five thousand, also reflects the difference between the geographical areas once it is understood that these men were a metaphor for the number of men to be supplied by the individual provinces and city-states to help establish the rebel army. The specificity of the numbers is too precise to reflect an incidental fact of a mass feeding. The point of the story could have been as easily made by an approximation such as, “and those who ate the loaves were *about* [author’s italics] five thousand men,” (Mark 6:44). The need to include an exact number was determined by the need of the rebel leaders to both firmly require of the provinces a conscription quota and also to know the precise number of

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troops that would be available. The intended difference between what was expected of the traditional Mosaeian provinces (five thousand troops) and those of the Hellenized provinces (four thousand troops) was just that, a recognition that more could be expected of traditional Mosaeians than of the less committed Hellenized Mosaeians who were living beyond the Jordan. Traditional Mosaeians would bear the brunt of the fighting by a slight margin, but Hellenized Mosaeians were expected to do their fair share. This nominal equality in drafting troops from the provinces also helps to explain Jesus' admonition to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" in Mark 8:15, the reference to leaven a metaphor for additional troops (as leaven increases the amount of dough for bread, the leaven of Herod and the Pharisees would increase the amount of troops available) that might be sent by the Pharisees and Herod (either Philip or Antipas, it is unclear from this remove to be certain) to join forces once the rebellion had begun. Those additional troops were not to be trusted, coming as they did from sources too closely aligned, too dependent on Roman support to be dependable. The holy war that Jesus envisioned was to be fought by righteous Mosaeians, not Roman lackeys.

The total number of troops under this system would have been, at a minimum, 63,000 (35,000 from the five traditional provinces and two Phoenician territories and 28,000 from the seven Hellenized provinces and city states), the exact number is uncertain because it is not known how many troops were expected from the city-states (the several small fish) which were also included. Perhaps a few more thousand could be expected, maybe as many as five to seven thousand more making a possible total of 70,000. An interesting coincidence at that time was that in 39 C.E. Herod Antipas was removed from power by the Roman authorities ostensibly on the accusation that he had a stockpile of enough weapons cached away to supply 70,000 troops. There is, of course, no way to determine if Herod's equipment had been destined for the aborted rebellion planned by Jesus a few years earlier, but there is no other explanation for the cache of arms either. Further suggestion that these miracles were metaphors disguising their military nature is revealed in the disposition of the baskets of leftovers. In the feeding of

the five thousand, five loaves and two fish rendered twelve baskets of crumbs while in the feeding of the four thousand, seven loaves and several small fish rendered seven baskets. If these items are metaphors for troops, the implication seems to be that the troops of the traditional Mosaeans were to be divided into twelve divisions and most probably commanded by the twelve tribal leaders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, while the Hellenized Mosaeans (the seven baskets of crumbs), were to be commanded by seven provincial leaders, perhaps due to their shared ability to speak Greek.

Another example that these miracles are metaphors for military arrangements is in the parallels between Mark 6 and the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q491, fragments 1-3, part of the War Scroll. The similarities between the two works help to explain the significance of the numbers in Mark and confirm that they were military divisions. The War Scroll fragment is a brief account about how the troops of the army of the Sons of Light were to form up on the day of battle:

“On that day, some men from all their tribes shall set out from their camps towards the House of Meeting....the [Priest]s, the Levites and all the chiefs of the camps shall go out towards them. They will pass there before... according to the Thousands, Hundreds, Fifties and Tens.”

(The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English, translated by Geza Vermes, Penguin Books, 2004).

In Mark 6, if ‘town’ is a synonym for ‘camp’ and if Jesus and his apostles are considered as the ‘Priests, the Levites and all the chiefs, the passages are strikingly similar. The men “from all the towns (camps)” run ahead of Jesus who is traveling by boat (a metaphor to indicate that he is free of the land and consequently politically disassociated from any particular province) and eventually meet up with him and his retinue. The men, in their thousands, are at once organized into groups of hundreds and fifties as if for inspection, much as the men in the War Scroll pass for inspection before their leaders on the day of battle. That

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Jesus, or at the very least the writers of the Gospels, seem to be familiar with the War Scroll seems a reasonable conjecture given the similarities of the passages, and it must be wondered what was the relationship between Jesus and or the Gospel writers with the people who wrote the War Scroll. Was Jesus familiar enough with the Qumran scrolls to incorporate them into his metaphorical teachings, or were the Gospel writers? While it is possible that the two passages are merely linked through coincidence, that seems less likely than Jesus, aware of the scroll and aware of some of the military strictures provided by it regarding the disposition of troops, simply incorporated some of them into his own commands. Whether or not Jesus' familiarity with the texts was because he was a member of the Qumran community at one time is more difficult to say.

Certainly, the idea of miracles as metaphor and magic as evidenced previously, was part of Jesus' teaching, a necessary component to his political agenda for reunification, but what of miracles as mystical interventions, pseudo miracles and healings designed to showcase his power and hint at his divine nature, can they too be explained? Jesus was almost as well known for his healings as he was for turning water to wine, feeding the masses and rising from the dead. Yet many of these miracles would hardly pass scrutiny today as anything more than artifice and sham, clever deceptions geared to make the unsophisticated gasp in wonder. As has been detailed, many of the miracles are actually metaphors, hidden lessons masking a political agenda. The restoration of sight and hearing miracles fall into this category as they are clearly metaphorical allusions to incidents of conversion; Jesus enabling someone or some group to cast off their doubts (their blindness or deafness) and fully embrace (through restored sight or hearing) the importance of re-establishing the Mosaeic covenant with God and rebuilding the United Monarchy. What is interesting to note in these episodes is that while Jesus restores, he never replaces. No missing limb is ever replaced, no lost arm or leg ever miraculously reappears, no gouged out eye is ever returned to its socket, no person dead beyond corruption is raised to wholeness. As with turning water into wine, these are miracles of human agency that are used as metaphors to

instruct those people who had been trained to decipher them. Real miracles, miracles of divine intervention in human affairs would have replaced a leg or an arm or put corrupted flesh back on bone. The rest of Jesus' miracles, those designed to impress the people and glorify Jesus as divine, are nothing more than staged events.

An example of this is the 'Raising of Lazarus' story found in John 11:1, and while it may record an actual event, its design and purpose in the Gospel is to convince a First Century audience of Jesus' divinity. This is stated very clearly early on in the pericope when Jesus states, "It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." A clearer statement of intent could not have been made. Both in the actuality of the event (the historical occurrence) and the Gospel recording of it, the intention was to convince an audience that Jesus had divine power through his ability to raise the dead. However, as with changing water to wine, the human agency involved with the raising of Lazarus is so patently obvious that the suggestion this resurrection is anything more than a planned attempt to impress onlookers is tenuous at best. The people central to the event (Mary, Martha and Lazarus) were siblings from Bethany, all of whom were friendly with Jesus, had entertained him at various times in their home and one of whom, Mary, had anointed him with precious oil and another, Lazarus, was considered beloved by Jesus. These were not random strangers disconnected from Jesus and his movement. Far from it, they were individuals intimate with Jesus, closely associated to him and trusted enough to play their roles in helping to establish him as the Messiah (Mary's anointing of Jesus) and his divinity (raising Lazarus). That they were a part of his inner circle seems certain. That they were a part of the movement to re-establish the United Monarchy seems equally assured.

It must be remembered that Jesus had miraculously healed from a distance before Lazarus became ill. In John 4:46-54, he had healed an official's son many miles away, so it is curious that he was either unable or unwilling to perform the same act for a beloved friend. That he does not heal Lazarus from a distance is an indicator that a greater

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miracle was called for, that a more impressive, unambiguous show was required. The people of Cana and Capernaum who had witnessed his healing of the official's son were a less skeptical lot, and more inclined to accept Jesus as a miracle worker, because of their unconventional thought and being less hampered by the ultra conservative Mosaeen views held by most Judeans and Jerusalemites. A healing from a distance would not suffice under the skeptical eyes of conservative Mosaeans. Consequently, the raising of Lazarus was planned to take place in Bethany of Judea, two miles from Jerusalem, literally in the back yard of conservative Mosaeen thought and practice. Jesus needed to resurrect the dead and he needed an audience of Judeans (preferably those same leaders who were planning his death) to witness the miracle so that they might accept him as Messiah and more importantly, he needed to be in attendance in order to be indisputably associated with the event. The resurrection of a person who had died from an illness was far easier to fake than one who had been killed violently or had suffered capital punishment. Feigning the death of Lazarus and subsequently faking his resurrection would not have posed any problems for Jesus and his followers and the potential benefits in terms of newfound prestige within the Judean community would have been enormous.

Like performing the water to wine trick, the raising of Lazarus from the dead required the behind the scenes efforts of committed followers to accomplish it and an audience to observe it. The family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus was ideally situated in Bethany to facilitate the deception and control the major aspects of the event; Lazarus to play the corpse, Martha and Mary to stay in Bethany in order to retain the crowd of Judean mourners (without Martha and Mary and with Lazarus safely in the tomb, there was every reason to anticipate that the crowd, in the absence of all of the principles, might have wandered away leaving Jesus, upon his arrival, without an audience). The fact that the mourners who had come to console Mary and Martha were pointedly referred to as 'Judeans' seems to indicate that they had arrived from somewhere else, presumably Jerusalem, since Bethany was located in Judea and the mourners would have been understood to

be ‘Judeans’ because of that and there would have been no need to refer to them as such, they would have been simply ‘townspeople’ in the Gospel account. As has been noted above, with Johanan ben Zakkai and with Jesus, the idea of feigning death to accomplish specific goals was not unheard of in First Century Mosaeon culture. It would have required very little effort for Lazarus and his sisters to feign his death in his own home and with his own family around him. Similarly, it would have required very little effort to prepare the body and have him buried in a cave tomb, that unlike traditional Western in-ground burials, allowed the person feigning death plenty of space and air to survive the burial for any number of days, the only limitations being access to food and water.

There is an oversight within the Gospel account that seems to confirm that Lazarus was in fact alive when he was placed in the tomb, a single oversight that is not found elsewhere in the story and one that is avoided neatly throughout the rest of the Gospels. Both Martha and Mary, although they seemingly had close contact with Lazarus during his illness and at his death and burial, retained their ritual purity throughout the episode, their implied contact with their brother’s corpse never making them ritually impure (*tumat met*). The events as recorded in John would seem to corroborate this. The two women were in the house where presumably the sick Lazarus lay until his ‘death’, a fact that would have rendered them ritually impure. However, both seemed to move freely among the mourners, and Jesus and his disciples, when in fact, according to the customs of their times, had they been in a building or roofed structure that contained a corpse they would have been ritually impure (*tumat ohel*) and would have remained so until they had obeyed the rites of purification, a combination of isolation, ritual bathing and prayer that would have lasted nearly a week and would have kept the women separate from others; relatives, friends and strangers alike. Assuming that Jesus was “across the Jordan” in “the place where John had been baptizing at first” (John 11:40), and that that place was nearly due east of Jerusalem, he would have been approximately twenty miles from Bethany when Martha and Mary sent word to him, one hard day’s travel away suggesting that Jesus was at

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‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’, the place where John first began to baptize, (John 1:28). Scholars and archaeologists have searched in vain trying to locate this ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’, ascribing to it locations up and down the Jordan River on both west and east banks without realizing that the name was merely a nickname used by Jesus and John for John’s original location on the Jordan on the Wadi el-Kharrar near the Hajlah ford.

‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ and Bethany near Jerusalem shared the commonality that they were both ‘houses of the poor’ (or *beth ani* in Hebrew) and as such were headquarters in a sense for Jesus and John. They shared topographical features as well, since both were located to the south-east of cities of major importance, (Jerusalem and Jericho), and were separated from those cities by similar topographical features; the seasonal watercourse of the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem and the Jordan River at Jericho, that meant that they both could be cut off from those cities during seasonal flooding. They were also both located on major travel routes that allowed for the broadest exposure to the population and the greatest ease in reaching them, the main road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Gospel of John’s reference to ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ was not a reference to another city but to the seasonal camp (due to the seasonal flooding of the Jordan) east of the Jordan that John had established to perform his baptisms, a camp that was just as closely associated with John’s movement as Bethany by Jerusalem was associated with Jesus and his activities. Just as Richard Nixon had the nicknamed ‘Western Whitehouse’ in California in addition to the official Whitehouse in Washington DC, John and Jesus had ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ in addition to Bethany near Jerusalem. That being the case, if Jesus was at Bethany beyond the Jordan, it would have taken one day in an emergency for the message to reach Jesus; he stayed an extra two days beyond the Jordan and took one, maybe two days to reach Bethany, for a total of four to five days before he was with Martha and Mary, a time when they still should have been ritually unclean and isolated. The fact that they were able to greet Jesus directly and that they were surrounded by mourners indicates that either they had not been in close proximity to a corpse

(either Lazarus had died outside of their house or Lazarus was not in fact dead) or that they were ignoring the purification rituals.

In direct contradiction to this seeming lapse on the women's part is Jesus' behavior upon reaching the tomb. In John 11:39, Jesus said, "Take away the stone", ordering someone else to approach the tomb and touch it while maintaining his own distance in order to preserve his purity (the purity laws required maintaining a distance of four cubits or approximately six feet from a corpse or tomb). This maintenance of the required distance was important for the Mosaeen audiences that would have first heard this story because they would have recognized that had he approached the tomb he would have been impure and would have required purification. This is in contrast to Jesus' behavior when he was in the presence of Jairus' daughter where he directly approached her bedside. The difference between the two episodes seems to be that in the raising of Jairus' daughter she is said to be 'asleep' while Lazarus is known to be dead, the identifications serving to inform the audiences that in one case it would have been alright to approach the 'sleeping' body without recourse to purification, while in the other it was required to stay some distance from the 'corpse'. The Gospel writers must have been acutely aware of any situations in their works that might have compromised Jesus' purity, but must have been much less aware of the same threat to Martha and Mary as principles in this story.

Certainly one explanation for the behavior of Martha and Mary was that they knew that their brother was alive and so were not concerned with purity rituals, allowing them to move among the mourners and Jesus freely. In a very real sense the miracle was dependent upon one of Jesus' followers, someone closely related to Lazarus and thereby emotionally invested enough to warrant heartfelt sympathy, remaining either at the house or tomb to maintain a focal point for the Judean mourners to gather about in order to witness Jesus' arrival and his subsequent raising of Lazarus. Mary and Martha, as siblings of the deceased, fit the need perfectly. Without them and their ability to maintain the crowd of mourners, the miracle might well have been ignored, forgotten or called off. Whether or not the crowd of

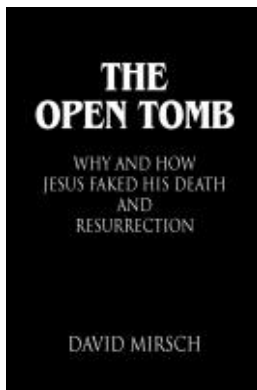
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Judeans ever questioned the ritual purity of the two women is left unanswered, although the fact that the crowd seemed to stay in close contact with them would seem to indicate that they were generally unconcerned, or that the writer of John's Gospel simply failed to take note of the possibility that audiences might consider the women to be impure. Either way, the omission of ritual impurity regarding Mary and Martha suggests that Lazarus was not dead. This is corroborated by the simplicity and human agency of Jesus' actions in performing the 'miracle'. Instead of moving the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb by means of his divine powers, as might be expected of someone about to raise the dead, Jesus was required to have someone else move the stone, and rather than any elaborate, hands on method of restoring life to the dead Lazarus, Jesus merely yells at Lazarus to come out of the tomb!

While such a simplistic and earthly approach to this resurrection may have been divine, the involvement of the three siblings who were friends and associates of Jesus, the lack of concern for ritual purity, the two or three days that the Judeans stayed in attendance after the burial (Lazarus must have 'died' on the day that Martha sent word to Jesus about his illness and would have been buried that day or the next and the crowd was still there upon Jesus' arrival four days after the burial), and the indication by either Jesus historically or the Gospel writer theologically (or both) that this miracle had an intentional purpose, and was not an incidental happenstance, seem to argue that the raising of Lazarus was a concocted event meant to establish Jesus' divinity. More than that, coming as it did a matter of days before Jesus' own death and resurrection, it strongly suggests that this was a trial or practice run for his own escape from the tomb, with Lazarus standing in his place. Although the means of death would be quite different in the two events, the transportation of the body, and feigning of death, would be similar, as would be the time in the tomb and the reaction of any witnesses to the perceived resurrection. Mainly it would have been important for Jesus to know from Lazarus how the time buried in the tomb had passed, how he had coped without food or water, and how well he could move and behave after the experience. Was it too cold or too

restrictive? Could any movement within the tomb be heard outside? Would dogs, sensing someone alive, show undue interest in the tomb? These were things that would have been of the utmost interest to Jesus.

Christian apologists, fond of establishing the veracity of the Gospel accounts through imagined legalistic examinations and scenarios, often claim that if the miracles of Jesus were subjected to the same type of rigorous scrutiny as any modern court case provides, the outcome will be always in favor of a divine intercession in the events. They also claim that when presented with the Gospel facts, a judge and/or jury, through lack of any more plausible explanation, will find in Jesus' favor, confirming his divinity and his miraculous powers. The reality, however, seems to present a completely different perspective, that presented with the Gospel claims, the judicial reason and rationality assumed to be a component of modern court cases would render a different verdict. Presented with the back bone of modern rational criminal analysis, that is, the motive, means and opportunity of such cases, many of the miracles ascribed to Jesus would fall far short of the miraculous and would instead prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was human agency involved, that human, not divine, motives were at play. In the case of raising Lazarus, Jesus' motive was clearly expressed (establishing his divine power), his means (the involvement of his friends and associates, Lazarus, Mary and Martha) were clearly on display and essential to the outcome of the event and his opportunity (the feigned death of Lazarus in Bethany, so close to Jerusalem and Jesus' own timely arrival) all combine to cast enough doubt upon the incident as to warrant a mistrial but more probably a resolution against the miraculous. That tradition continues to avow these events as divine only confirms the need of the faithful to believe what they want to believe.



The Open Tomb re-examines the historical record about Jesus, and discovers his political motives for faking his death and resurrection. Taken directly from the Gospels, the Dead Sea Scrolls and First Century historians, the book sheds new light on the historical Jesus and, for the first time in two millennia, strips away Christian tradition, and exposes the truth.

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