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## *Nova et Vetera: Revisiting The New Testament World (Part I)*

A review article based on Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, Doubleday, 1997). Anchor Bible Reference Library. pp. xxxvii + 878 (maps, tables & illustrations). US\$42.50. ISBN 0-385-24767-2.

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***Nova et Vetera: Revisiting The New Testament World\****

*[T]he clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in the miracles by which Christianity is supported... the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events; they differ in too many important details...to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitnesses...Beautiful as is the morality of the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that its perfection depends in part on the interpretation which we now put on metaphors and allegories.*

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

*Autobiography (1882)*

***Introduction:***

Two-thirds of the way through Raymond Brown's fascinating and long-awaited volume, in his introductory notes on *Romans*, the late (1928-1998) and much-respected scholar offers NT students some sage but startling advice:

*For those who may have time to study in greater depth only one Pauline letter, Romans would not be my recommendation, even though it is the most important (p. 559).*

That follows on Brown's comments that *Romans* is "indisputably Paul's *chef d'oeuvre*" and that "with only slight exaggeration one could claim that [past] debates over the main ideas in *Romans* split Western Christianity."

That is only one instance, but perhaps the most notable, where Brown directly addresses the reader for whom this - his final - book is intended: those who develop an interest in the NT completely on their own, and those who come to it in a more formal (educational) setting. Neither of those types of reader will be disappointed.

Nor will those who use *INT* as a teaching guide or recommend it as a reference tool. It is therefore all the sadder that Brown died suddenly and unexpectedly before any but the sketchiest of reviews (e.g. Saldarini, 1997) were in print.

David Noel Freedman, Brown's long-time friend and colleague as well as editor of the *ABRL* series, referred to the *INT* (in a letter to me shortly after Brown's death on 1 August 1998) as an unplanned "valedictory" to his field of study. And like a good valedictory it imparts as much about its author as it does about its topic.

In his Introduction, Brown noted that the bibliography in *INT* is largely restricted to sources in English - that is, either as the original language of publication or in translations - to allow quick access to useful secondary literature for students without reading knowledge of other European languages. Accordingly the bibliography for this review (with some exceptions) is aimed at such students.

### ***The Structure of the INT:***

Brown's *INT* charts a relatively orderly course for students to follow. After some introductory remarks ("Background Material") on abbreviations used, a chronological table and several useful maps, there are five short chapters grouped as Part I: "Preliminaries for Understanding the New Testament," which occupy the first 100 pages.

The next nine chapters (6-14) constitute Part II: "The Gospels and Related Works." Here Brown discusses not only the Synoptics and John, but includes *Acts* (as the second half of a unified *Luke-Acts*) and the three Johannine letters (as closely-related documents from the same community if not the same author as the *Gospel of John*).

"The Pauline Letters" are treated in Part III. Following three chapters of introductory material, including his very personal ten-page "Appreciation of Paul," Brown devotes a chapter each to I & II Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, I & II Corinthians and Romans. On this portion of the vineyard he expends extra labor.

Part IV, "The Other New Testament Writings," is given over to Hebrews, I Peter, James, Jude, II Peter and The Book of Revelation (The Apocalypse), in that order. Two essay-length appendices, "The Historical Jesus," and "Jewish and Christian Writings Pertinent to the NT" complete the text and are followed by both subject and author indices.

Readers will be glad to know that the text of *INT* is as free of NT scholarly jargon as only someone familiar with its pervasive and detrimental effects could make it. Biblical Studies is just as guilty as any other academic discipline at finding terminology as tediously pedantic as it is irritatingly cute. R.E. Brown avoided that temptation; “macarism” (“blessing”, p. 245) is a rare exception.

From the beginning Brown is careful to point out what we don’t know about Christian beginnings. Even the little that we do know is fraught with difficulties – textual transmission, uncertainties over provenance and dating of documents, chronology, contradictory data, biased sources, geographical restraints and modern interpretations:

*We shall never know all the details of how the twenty-seven books were written, preserved, selected, and collected; but one fact is indisputable. Joined as the NT, they have been the single most important instrument in bringing untold millions of people from different times and places into contact with Jesus of Nazareth and the first believers who proclaimed him.(15)*

Just to make sure that casual readers and/or serious students are aware that the Bible itself is “biased,” Brown reminds us that

*The fact that both Testaments were produced by believers for believers and were preserved by believers to encourage belief is not a factor that should enter into interpretation.(30)*

In addition, Brown offers (vii-xii) six “clarifications” with regard to his overall intentions for the *INT*: it is not written for scholars; its focus is solely the NT documents; its focus is on the “extant text of the NT books, not on their prehistory;” it stresses reading of, not just reading about, the NT; it addresses religious, spiritual and ecclesiastical issues within the NT; finally, it aims to be “centrist, not idiosyncratic.”

### ***Agendas and Attitudes:\****

That last concern may serve as a reminder to students that any comprehensive work on the NT must be read with attention to agenda and attitude on the part of the author(s). That may be exemplified by reference

to Stephen Neil's *Interpretation of the New Testament* (1963; expanded edition, 1988) which fails to mention either Robert Eisler or Joseph Klausner, both of whom produced controversial but unusually interesting works the late 1920s.

Eisler's *Iêsous: Basileus ou Basileusas* (The odd Greek title translates as *Jesus: A King Who Didn't Reign* [Eisler 1929/30]; the title was taken from the Old Slavonic text of Josephus' *BJ*) evoked generally hostile reaction among contemporary NT scholars, most of whom rejected Eisler's revolutionary Jesus, executed for sedition, based in part on Eisler's acceptance of an Old Slavonic version of Flavius Josephus' *Testimonium* plus other marginal documentation.

*Iêsous Basileus* didn't help Eisler's case through its English translation: *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (1931), which not only condenses much, and excises some, of the original German text, but ranged far beyond the translator's bounds into editorial territory. On that, see the insightful biographical sketch of the translator, Alexander Haggerty Krappe, in Metzger (1997, pp. 216-218).

Joseph Klausner's *Yeshû han-Nôsrî* (Hebrew original published in Jerusalem, 1922; first English translation *Jesus of Nazareth* in London, 1925) has had a better reception. He was the first Jewish scholar of international reputation to study the life of Jesus (and later, the career of Paul in *From Jesus to Paul* [1944]). Not all NT scholars of high regard dismiss Eisler or Klausner.

Some (e.g. the late S.G.F. Brandon) owed much to both of them for aspects of their own interpretations of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Others admire Eisler and Klausner as brilliant iconoclasts. The late F.F. Bruce, notoriously intolerant of shabby scholarship, wrote of Eisler's *Iêsous Basileus* as "... a monument of misplaced ingenuity, and yet a repository of miscellaneous learning for the reader who can distinguish fact from theory" (Bruce, 1980b, p. 135 quoted in Metzger, 1997, p. 217).

Bruce found even more to interest him within Klausner's books on Jesus and Paul. "He was an authority on the history of Israel's messianic hope, and he more than any other writer introduced me to the Jewish background of the NT writings. It was illuminating, too, to see our Lord

and the apostles (especially Paul) through the eyes of a modern Zionist” (Bruce, 1980b, pp. 134-135).

Ernst Bammel has also expressed admiration for both Eisler and Klausner. In an essay which should be required reading of every NT student, Bammel lauds Eisler’s *Messiah* as “a new departure of the greatest importance ...nothing of a comparable penetration and so engaging an ingenuity had been presented to the learned [NT] world before...” (Bammel, 1984, p. 32).

Bammel also finds Klausner’s *Jesus* a work worthy of attention; he characterizes Klausner as “the first [modern] Jew who ventured a life of Jesus,” even though the author imbued it with “a quasi-Zealot interpretation” (Bammel, 1984, p. 44). For conservatives such as Neil or centrists like R.E. Brown, the Jesus of Eisler/Klausner is totally unacceptable – either historically or theologically.

This is especially unfortunate because their unorthodox views are often confused with those who have legitimately earned a place on the far fringes of biblical scholarship (e.g. Hugh Schonfield, *The Passover Plot*, 1967; John Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, 1970; Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1992). All deserve the scorn they received when those books were published.

But NT students need to differentiate between pseudo-scholars and genuine, brilliant eccentrics such as Eisler and Klausner. That is less so because the latter’s interpretations of Jesus’ life and death might be correct, but because their controversial works often serve as sources of useful but otherwise obscure information. There is a clear, important distinction between novelty and obfuscation.

### ***The New Testament Canon:***

Brown is surprisingly reluctant to use the term “canon;” there is no direct reference to it in the table of contents. Chapter 1 is entitled “The Nature and Origin of the New Testament” and within it we are gradually introduced to the collection of documents which in time (certainly by c. 200) became the NT canon.

Chapter 2 (“How to Read the New Testament”) takes readers into the thorny area of biblical interpretation, with this useful caveat to guide them

along: “To be blunt, the study of different kinds of interpretation is difficult – indeed at times it’s too difficult for beginners” (20).

By Chapter 3 (“The Text of the New Testament”) Brown has made good use of Bruce Metzger’s three fundamental studies of how the NT took shape (Metzger, 1977a; 1987, 1992) and we are well on our way. But it might be wise to let Metzger summarize that complex process so that readers can better understand its evolutionary aspect, and appreciate how little we really know about it:

*The recognition of the canonical status of the several books of the New Testament was the result of a long and gradual process, in the course of which certain writings, regarded as authoritative, were separated from a much larger body of early Christian literature.*

*Although this was one of the most important developments in the thought and practice of the early Church, history is virtually silent as to how, when and by whom it was brought about. Nothing is more amazing in the annals of the Christian Church than the absence of detailed accounts of so significant a process (Metzger, 1987, p. 1)*

Paul’s correspondence (at least those seven letters generally agreed upon as his alone) is among the earliest documents relating to nascent Christianity. Some classes devoted to Christian origins urge students to approach the NT canon chronologically, rather than in the traditional sequence (even though that is an arbitrary order and not always followed in the various NT editions/translations).

That means beginning with Paul (I Thess, I & II Cor) as well as the “we” passages of Acts in an examination of “bedrock” texts that go back as far as the 50s and early 60s of the first century. Some (the hymn at Phil 2:5-11 and the eucharistic formula at I Cor 11:20) may go back to the earliest Jewish-Christians in Palestine.

The four Gospels, Acts and the Pauline epistles taken together account for 80% of the canonical NT. They are also collectively the documents of most probative historical value. That is, they contain material which can be dated either absolutely or relatively, or can be compared/contrasted



with contemporary, non-Christian sources in specific ways that the rest of the NT documents cannot.

For those reasons this review will focus on that 80% of the NT and not address the remaining portion in the same detail. There is, accordingly, less attention given to matters theological than Brown himself offers readers of *INT*. For that there is no better solution than to let him speak for himself – not just through the *INT* but via his lifetime’s labors within the fruitful vineyards of the NT.

### *The Quest for the Elusive “Q”:*

There is also the “Q” material which can be extracted from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Like the hymns noted above, the *logia* or “sayings source” from which those two gospels borrowed must have circulated first in oral form. But was it still a spoken source at the time that Matthew and Luke incorporated it, or had it become a written document?

That “Q” and hymnal material may be as close as we can get for the present to the historical Jesus outside the Passion Narratives, but it must be utilized with extreme caution. Students may find the constant sifting of Abraham Lincoln quotations to distinguish dross from gold (McPherson, 1996) to be an instructive parallel endeavor.

Brown devotes almost ten pages (pp. 116-125) to an essay entitled “The Existence of Q”; this includes a useful double-page, detailed table “Material Usually Allotted to Q,” and a separate section of bibliography, “Q Research.” His methodology throughout reminds one of Abelard’s dialectical approach in his famous *Sic et Non* (published in 1122).

Nowhere in NT studies today is speculation and reconstructive imagination more evident than in the efforts of the International Q Project to recreate a document that may or may not have existed. New ways of looking at portions of it (e.g. Kirk, 1999 – as wisdom literature) continue to appear. Charlotte Allen characterizes the IQP endeavor this way:

*The Q “manuscript” now has such palpable reality in the minds of its proponents that [Burton] Mack in his The Lost Gospel [1993] refers to it matter-of-factly as a “document.” ...[Thus the] entire edifice – building from hypothesis to*

*document to Gospel to theology to community – is either a marvel of perceptive scholarship or [just a] showy sandcastle (Allen, 1996, pp. 56-57).*

Edward Meaders puts it thus: “Q has become an archaeological dig promising to reveal successive layers of primitive Q community thought about Jesus and his teaching. Technical terms, the wisdom stratum, the prophetic stratum, the apocalyptic stratum [all] have become common among those who write on the subject” (Meaders, 1999, p. 253). Meaders then describes what his “trowel” has uncovered: “the messianic profile of the Q material” on which he builds a case for several independent sayings that have “messianic implications.”

The IQP provides its adherents a focus and a forum, but recent publications (four volumes of *Documenta Q* appeared between 1996-98) have led some to question its methodology. No one has done so with more steadfastness of purpose than Michael Goulder, who likens IQP to a “juggernaut,” and his own role regarding it to Kierkegaard’s clown who is laughed offstage when he tells his audience that the theatre is on fire (Goulder, 1999, p. 506).

Goulder then goes on to document 17 instances where Q material in Matthew, much more so than in Luke, indicates a strong stylistic relationship between Q and Matthew: *So many phrases, clauses, whole sentences, many of them of striking form, often linked by a common doctrinal tendency, seem to compel the conclusion that Q’s thought and language are very similar to Matthew’s* (1999, pp. 515-516).

Whether other conclusions remain to be drawn from those data – Goulder openly invites us to challenge him – one corollary seems to be clear: Q was most probably a written document. Quite independent of Goulder’s thesis is the even more provocative essay by James M. Robinson (1999). He believes he has identified, within the parable featuring “lilies of the field,” a scribal error in the imagery of “consider how they *grow*; neither do they work, nor do they spin.”

Simply put, Robinson finds that the traditional texts (Mt 6:28 and Lk 12:27) have independently borrowed from Q a verbal mistake – the original Greek read “not card”(ὁὐ ξάινει) but was misread as “grow” (αὐξάινει). It is a small but significant variant, indicating that Q had incorporated that misreading before Matthew and Luke used it. The

original text, according to Robinson, can be recovered from P. Oxy. 655, from the Gospel of Thomas 36, and is also a palimpsest in Codex Sinaiticus.

That original must have read, as Robinson believes, “consider the lilies, which neither card, nor spin.” If so, many texts of Mt 6:28 and two variants of Lk 12:27, he argues, demonstrate that the independent versions of Q which they utilized contained the error, and (it follows) “the archetype of Q, from which Matthew and Luke’s copies were made, itself must have been a defective copy, reading “grow” for “not card” (Robinson, 1999, p. 67).

Goulder and Robinson, respectively, demonstrate the precarious (some would say precocious) scholarly quality and the potential for genuine advance in our understanding of how the NT developed, which the IQP represents. It may be possible that new papyrological finds of even modest proportions can eventually enable “Q supporters” and “Q detractors” to find some common ground: J.K. Elliott (1999 a&b) has just published a total of eleven new NT papyri fragments. One may hope that F.F. Bruce’s comment will serve as a useful reminder:

*The NT writings were not, of course, designed as historians’ source-material, and apart from Luke-Acts they are not written in historiographical style; but historians will not be deterred on that account from using them as source-material; nor will they be intimidated by the theologians who assure them that their task is impossible and illegitimate (Bruce, 1980b, 167 note #19).*

### ***The Passion Narratives:***

It is common opinion within NT studies to accept that each of the four Gospels took shape around recollections of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. There is closer agreement about the outlines of the final week in the life of Jesus than there is almost anywhere else in the gospels. That general agreement isn’t contradicted by other evidence from the NT (e.g. Paul) or from the historical sources regarding Jesus outside the NT (e.g. Josephus).

No one was better qualified to discuss the PNs than Raymond E. Brown, following on his critically-acclaimed two-volume study, *The Death of the Messiah* (Brown, 1994). Readers will find his comments toward the end of the unit he devotes to each gospel to be succinct and informative. To the bibliography included there we may now add Taylor (1998; on the sites of the crucifixion and burial), as well as Newman (1999; on later Jewish sources for the death of Jesus).

The Passion Narratives (PNs) include some basic or “bedrock” material, but it’s far more difficult to identify except in general outline. Of critical importance is that Paul and The Gospel of John agree that Jesus’ last meal, arrest, trials and execution all took place *prior to* the onset of Passover in A.D. 30 or slightly later.

That view remains fundamental to a logical, i.e. historically probable, chronology of the Passion. One generation ago Judah Segal argued (in my view, very persuasively) that the Synoptic Gospels

*transformed the Last Supper into a Pesah meal, and endowed it with the ritual that was characteristic of that occasion...The very fact that the most important component [i.e. a ritually slaughtered lamb] of the Pesah meal is not mentioned by the Synoptic Gospels is a clear indication that the identification of the Last Supper as a Pesah meal is an artificial device. (Segal, 1963, 245 – conveniently ignored by Feeley-Harnik [1994] pp. 115-120 in her discussion of this).*

Because the Last Supper wasn’t a Passover Seder doesn’t allow us to transpose it to another time of year, as Akenson (1998b, p. 553 and note 34) proposes. Although nowhere suggesting an alternative season, he emphatically takes issue with Christian tradition. This is done by conjuring a “probability” factor: “Statistically, there is roughly a one in fifty chance that it occurred in the seven or eight days around Passover” (ibid, p. 598). The season of the Nativity is far better suited than the time of the Crucifixion for such gratuitous speculation.

### ***The Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT:***

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), after a half-century of intensive study, continue to enlighten NT researchers who do not ask of them what they cannot answer. Readers of *INT* will quickly discover how often and how well Brown's discerning use of DSS material informs and elucidates so many of his important discussions (see below in my notes on "Additional Material" toward the end of this review).

Whether the DSS are really the library of an Essene community, and whether that community resided at Khirbet Qumran, is as yet an unsettled issue, and of far less importance to NT studies than the documents themselves. The latter's dual emphasis on messianism and eschatology is perhaps the strongest link to earliest Christianity, and we may note as well some similarities of communal terminology (see the section of this review on "Early Christian Communities).

### ***Old and New Tools for NT Research:\****

The *INT* lacks a separate chapter, or section of a chapter, on the resources available today, in particular the latest computer/CD ROM programs, specifically designed for students and other readers and researchers of the NT.

Brown does include within the numerous chapter bibliographies (particularly in the first three chapters) notations on fundamental bibliographical aids, such as *New Testament Abstracts* and *Elenchus* (of *Biblica*), basic to any NT research. There is far more.

Another handy place to find what I call "traditional sources" is the chapter entitled "Tools for the Job" in F.F. Bruce's memoir, *In Retrospect* (Bruce, 1980b, pp. 290-298). As comprehensive as he tried to be, the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1968) was overlooked (the new, revised version [*NJBC* 1990] is an even better reference work) and there is no mention of *NTA* and *Elenchus*.

But scholars and serious researchers of today are blessed with an assortment of NT tools not even dreamed of when Bruce penned his chapter. Those learning Greek, and those developing some expertise, will want to check the new software designed for them (Hunt, 1995).

“BibleWorks for Windows 95” has been networked on many computers at university and seminary libraries, with fonts for Greek and Hebrew.

Students of any proficiency in Greek should be aware that the revised supplement of the Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* was published in 1996. Its 20,000 entries include Linear B material and the latest papyrological and epigraphical sources. There are no plans to put the dictionary itself or this supplement on-line soon.

Those in need of an up-dated NT concordance and an exegetical grammar for the new millennium will want to peruse Kohlenberger et al. (1995) and Wallace (1996), respectively. For those wishing an update on the International Greek New Testament Project, Epp (1997) will elaborate upon what was summarized in Metzger (1997, pp. 56-66).

There is now a progress report available (Horsley & Lee, 1997) on the lexical project to replace Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, now 70 years old. The CD ROM “PHI 6” which has been available since 1996 is now supplemented by “PHI 7” – new documents and texts in electronically recoverable form.

For many years Robert A. Kraft of the Department of Religious Studies, The University of Pennsylvania, made available his useful Internet service, OFFLINE: Computer-Assisted Research for Religious Studies (Nos. 1-5 in the *BCSR* [1984-85] and Nos. 6-44 in *RSN* [1986-1994]). Since then users have had to access the SBL World Wide Web.

### ***Old & New Tools for NT Research:***

The latest issue (available to me) of *New Testament Abstracts* 43 (1999) contains a new section under the rubric “Software” (634-636) with much more information on machine-readable sources. Those researching the synoptic gospels should soon be able to consult a new concordance, the first volume of which (Hoffman et al., 1999?) is scheduled for publication this year.

According to a “pre-review” in the *Toronto Journal of Theology* 15 (1999) p. 92, this will be a 4-volume set totalling about 5,000 pages, available in its entirety by 2001: “The Synoptic Concordance is a new research tool for the analysis of the first three gospels, and it presents an

extensive mass of data that facilitates in a major way their literary and linguistic analysis.” Let's hope so.

No one in NT studies should fail to take account of the wider world of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean to place the development of Christianity within its geo-political and cultural context. A tool to facilitate that is *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Talbert, 2000), an international project scheduled for publication in September, 2000. Its 99 full-color maps and a detailed, 1500-page directory will span the period from Archaic Greece through late antiquity.

Lest we forget the basic texts behind all these lexical aids, and get lost in the maze of new technological programs and guides, we should let the final words of this part be those of Prof. Bruce:

*But with all his gratitude for such aids to study as these, the New Testament student will bear in mind the necessity of going back to the sources – [to those] first- and second-century authors themselves. Even the most erudite and judicious of modern scholars may at times misinterpret those authors: the student will want to consult them for himself and to reach his own decision on their significance. (Bruce, 1980b, p. 297).*

### ***Archaeology and the NT:\****

Also important for tracing Christian origins is archaeological evidence. As the techniques of excavating, the methods of recording and the quality of publishing become increasingly sophisticated, it is necessary to keep abreast of new developments. It won't be long before computer-assisted “virtual archaeology,” already employed to recreate many sites and cities excavated throughout the world (e.g. Forte & Silotti, 1996), will enable the NT researcher to explore a three-dimensional replica of Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Corinth.

Archaeological data includes as well the less resplendent but no less important evidence: provincial coins minted during Pilate's governorship; the Caesarea inscription attesting him as *praefectus Iudaeae*; the extant remains of Herod Antipas' fortress at Machaerus in Jordan where

Josephus (not the NT) tells us John the Baptist was executed. All of those existed during the lifetime of Jesus.

Within Jerusalem the site of the Upper Room (the Cenacle), and the location of Pilate's *praetorium* (the latter hotly debated since the 1950s) have both received thoughtful attention. Murphy-O'Connor (1995) argues that the medieval building on the "traditional" site of the Last Supper/Pentecost was constructed on foundations that go back "to the late Roman" era (2nd-3rd century), but fails to bridge the archaeological gap between then and A.D. 30/33.

Bargil Pixner (1987) has better luck in positing the location of the *praetorium* in the Hasmonaean Palace rather than the Herodian Palace on the Citadel above it, or the Antonia Fortress outside the northern wall of the Temple. Central to his argument is that Herod, and then from A.D. 6 each *praefectus/procurator* of Judaea, used the Herodian Palace as a residence, and reserved the Hasmonaean Palace as their administrative headquarters.

Outside Palestine there is little that can be directly related to the earliest missionary phase of Christianity: the famous Greek inscriptions from Corinth attesting Gallio as Achaean proconsul in 51/52 (Murphy-O'Connor, 1990, pp. 149-160; 179-182) and designating the synagogue in which (presumably) Paul (Acts 18:4) worshipped (Maier, 1997, p. 289; inexplicably omitted by Murphy-O'Connor, 1990).

Antioch, where important archaeological work was halted by WW II, remains – 60 years later – a site trapped in limbo. It is unable to be excavated because the region of modern Syria in which it was located was ceded to Turkey as part of an Allied agreement to keep Turkey neutral during the war. Ernest Will (1997) summarized what we know, and don't know, about that famous city in an article that was in press at the time of his death.

Of first-century date are the Galilee "fishing boat" recovered and restored recently (Nun, 1999, p. 27), and the inscribed bilingual ossuary of "Caiaphas" from Jerusalem (*BAR* 18.5 1992). The Herodian Temple's Western Wall, part of a Greek inscription (*OGIS* #598= *SEG* 7 #169) which forbade Gentiles from entering the inner court, and a fragment of



carved stone from the temple area (*BAR* 24.4 [1998] 20) are among the more dramatic, durable reminders of Judaeon Judaism.

Reminders of Galilean Judaism are the fragmentary remains of the first century synagogue at Capernaum within the more impressive and much-photographed ruins of a third-or fourth-century synagogue. There are also the alleged remains of Peter's home (or that of his mother-in-law?) in Capernaum (on those remains and others noted in the paragraph above, see Maier, 1997, pp. 102-105 and *BAR* 25.4 [1999]).

Readers may make what they wish of the alleged remains of St. Peter from Vatican excavations of 50 years ago (Walsh, 1982), or of the SATOR/ROTAS word-square found at Pompeii and at several other European sites (Chadwick, 1967, p. 62), or of the cross-shape found on a plaster wall of what is said to be a house-chapel in Herculaneum (Maier, 1997, pp. 324-326) or of the House of Clement in Rome (Bruce, 1980b, p. 261).

The Shroud of Turin, long reputed to be the *shroud* or burial-cloth of Jesus, was relegated to near-oblivion after its Carbon-14 dating (based on several independent tests in 1988) indicated that the linen material was of medieval (14th century) manufacture. That meant, more importantly, that the image of a Christ-like corpse on the Shroud was a clever hoax (Maier, 1997, p. 347 note 3 to chap. 22).

Like Lazarus, the Shroud has re-emerged from interment to the amazement of all but its most devoted adherents (i.e. "shroudies"). Readers of *Biblical Archaeological Review* have been able to follow the nuances of more recent developments (see *BAR* 24.4 & 24.6 [1998] and *BAR* 25.4 [1999]). Addicts now have a hot-line telephone (1-877-A-SHROUD) for information on "the most intriguing antiquity of all time." Even the *New York Times* can't ignore it (Stevens, 1999).

Except for Paul's letters, all of this material is fragmentary and much of it, inevitably, understandably puzzling. Students must learn to deal with it – only then will they appreciate the connected narrative aspect of the Gospels and Acts, which should help put the remaining NT documents into context. Familiarity with sources from the fields of ancient history and archaeology is now an essential.

### ***The Early Christian Communities:***

For teachers, such an approach may be “tough love,” but unless students understand that the Gospels are a later development in the history of earliest Christianity; they will get a false impression of coherence and purpose in the post-Pentecost church. As we learn from Acts’ account of Stephen and the Hellenists at Jerusalem, the message of Jesus was open to interpretation from the beginning.

There has long been a debate as to the nature of early groups of Christians, especially whether there existed simultaneously two distinctly different linguistic elements – Aramaic and Greek – within Palestine itself (particularly Jerusalem) as well as within various communities in regions evangelized by Paul and others. That debate was summarized a generation ago by I.H. Marshall (Marshall, 1973).

Marshall argued persuasively that bilingualism and other cross-cultural links among believers made it difficult if not impossible to posit separatist Christian churches, at least in the pre-Jewish War era. The death of Stephen at the hands of the Sanhedrin, if the episode is history and not propaganda, indicates that the Jerusalem hierarchy found a Greek-speaking Jew to be theologically repugnant.

Stephen was Jewish-Christian, and something should be said of the reaction to Christianity within Jewish communities – primarily those in Palestine but also throughout the Diaspora. It is doubtful if Gentile Christian communities produced sustained hostility among Jews, but Jakob Jocz argued very persuasively that Jewish-Christian enclaves did provoke resentment (and in Stephen’s case, hostility).

Exactly fifty years ago Jocz (1949, 42-65) drew attention to what he termed “countermeasures to Hebrew-Christian influence upon Jewish society” in the later first century. These included (not in any special order other than general to specific) banishment from synagogues, some alterations to the liturgy, adoption of a curious “blessing” (the *Birkat ha-Minim*) and vituperative attacks on Jesus.

Of those the *Birkat ha-Minim* (Prayer against the Heretics or Apostates or Sectarians) is of interest for its specificity. From a text recovered in the Cairo *Genizah* Jocz quotes in translation:

*For the renegades (lameshummadim) let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom (Rome?) soon be rooted out...and the Nazarenes (ha-nozrim) and the minim (heretics) perish (as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life) and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest [for us] the arrogant (Jocz, 53).*

It remains problematical how much of that text is original and may date to the decade just after the destruction of Jerusalem, and how much may be later. Jocz (1949, p. 57) argued that *minim* was in the original prayer and included all non-Pharisaical sects of Judaism. *Nozrim* was added later (in the 90s?) when messianic sects (such as that which produced The Apocalypse) were particularly prominent.

Some three centuries later, when Christianity had become not only a *religio licita* but the state religion of the Roman Empire, educated and articulate easterners such as the historian Ammianus Marcellinus (330-400) could distinguish themselves from Christians by asserting their Greek affiliation: *miles quondam et Graecus* (“a Greek and a former soldier”) is how he characterized his own social identity (Barnes, 1998, p. 80). For us today, he was simply a “pagan.”

Contemporary with Ammianus are the remains of what is alleged to be the earliest building specifically designed as a church. This mud-brick structure (which may have had a second storey) was among several buildings excavated recently within the Roman (first-fourth century) settlement at Aila/Aqaba, modern Jordan’s only port on the Red Sea (see Parker, 1998a; 1998b for the evidence to date).

But that is beyond the scope of Brown’s approach to the world of the NT, to which I will devote a large portion of this article. But before so doing, it would be appropriate to offer a few words about the message of Christianity, the source of that message, and the earliest of its messengers.

### ***The Message of the Empty Tomb:\****

There is surprisingly little said by Brown about the central belief that defined Christianity and set it apart from Judaism as well as other contemporary Mediterranean religions. That belief is centered on the

Resurrection and the subsequent, brief reappearance of Jesus – to his family and followers at Jerusalem, and in Galilee.

It is followed by references to visions of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Paul) and by the legendary appearance of the Lord just outside the gates of Rome (Peter). It is Peter alone who received a second post-Easter visit. Constantine's supernatural or cosmic vision was not of Jesus, but the manifestation of a cross in the sky just before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (A.D. 312).

Apart from the obligatory discussion of the Resurrection as it is described in three of the four canonical Gospels (Mk 16:9-20 is accepted [pp. 148-149] as a later addition), Brown's closest attention is given to Paul's reflections on the risen Christ in I Cor 15, "a centerpiece in the argument about the reality of the resurrection of Jesus ... [by] the only NT writer who claims personally to have witnessed an appearance of the risen Jesus" (p. 534).

Brown himself nowhere addresses the Resurrection on a personal level, i.e. whether or not it has special meaning to him. Students may find that a bit disconcerting or even disappointing. Perhaps it would be useful to suggest they read a recent essay on that subject by the former Roman Catholic monk and present New Testament scholar, Donald Spoto (Spoto, 1998, pp. 231-249).

Spoto knows that the key to understanding the Resurrection is faith, and because of that its historicity can never be validated:

*The language of faith, like that of the poet, the lover and the mystic, does not simply relate secular facts about what occurred in history at a particular moment ... Faith experiences and speaks of the divine initiative and intervention in the world... (1998, pp. 245).*

A radically different religious concept had to be transmitted via missionaries, and via the family of Galilean Jews from whom the message ultimately derived. Brown is careful to define the implicit irony of what initiated the new mission: "The major step of moving outside Jerusalem to preach to a wider audience is not the result of planning but of persecution" (p. 296).

There should be a sense of wonder throughout any reading of the NT that so unlikely a collection of material has survived and can yet command so much attention. The NT presents a message that is outrageous and paradoxical, particularly within its Palestinian Jewish matrix. That the message was less problematic for non-Jews ultimately led to its acceptance:

*[A] church which worshipped as godlike a dead man who had carried a biblical curse, a religion possibly less than [totally] monotheistic, which professed to regard as Satanic the world's principalities and powers, was hardly likely to raise the public esteem for the synagogue or to glorify the Name ... Where tithes and even the Temple tax had no intrinsic meaning, where the sabbath could be overridden by evangelical activities, where Pharisaical traditions were baseless, and even circumcision [was] optional, Greek monotheising religiosity could be tapped comparatively readily (Derrett [1982] pp. 556-7).*

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for moderns is understanding – and appreciating – what resurrection meant to the Pharisees of first century Judaism (among whom we must count Paul) rather than simply retrojecting our own concept of it. The reality of the risen Christ to those who experienced it, whether before or after the Ascension, indicates that Jesus had a corporeality which was visible, not just a spiritual or metaphysical presence that was somehow “perceived”.

That is where Derrett (1982) and others miss the mark in their characterization of the early Christian community. The risen Christ was more than just a “dead man walking.” If not, there is no way to understand why so many intelligent Christians - from the Stephen who was stoned for his faith in Jerusalem through a high school student murdered for her faith in Littleton, Colorado - would choose death rather than renounce their belief.

### ***Saul/Paul of Tarsus and Flavius Josephus:\****

Such faith did not always come quickly, and some communities of “believers” in the risen Christ had great difficulty in agreeing on the nature of Jesus, what Henry Chadwick termed “the problem of the person

of Christ” (Chadwick, 1967, Chapter 14). Indeed, some of the communities to which Paul writes (Corinth, especially) cannot be characterized (at least at the moment of his writing) with the expression “believers.”

Perhaps the earliest of those “believers” (outside Palestine) were already a community when Paul arrived in Damascus (Acts 9:10-25) – and they aren’t heard of again! There is no reason to assume, as many do, that Paul was sent there solely to arrest the refugee Christians from Jerusalem. Damascene Jews had already converted to Christianity; Paul apparently was given authority to include them. Unless the entire incident is a fabrication, which seems unlikely, we are left to ponder why Paul never repaid his first visit there.

Another irony is the absence of Saul/Paul in Josephus, who was young (born in 37) and a resident of Jerusalem during all but a few of the formative years of the Jewish-Christian community (at age 17 [A.D. 54] he joined an ascetic community in the Judaeac desert, but returned to Jerusalem at age 19 in A.D. 56 [*The Life* 9-12]). How is it possible that Josephus omits any reference to Paul?

This is no idle question. Two of the standard works on Paul’s relation to Judaism do not even raise it. In the extensive indices to W.D. Davies’ *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (4th ed. 1980), Josephus appears several times as a source of information on first century Judaism but not once as a subject. H. Lichtenberger (1996) features Josephus and Paul in his study of Neronian Rome, but his subsection “Paul and Josephus” examines only some parallels in their careers.

E.P. Sanders’ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) acknowledges Josephus as a source in several places, but also fails to query the fact that Paul goes unmentioned by a contemporary Jew with intimate links to Jerusalem’s high-priestly aristocracy. It may be possible to understand Josephus’ omission of Paul by considering those whose connection to early Christianity caught the historian’s attention.

Josephus’ reference to Jesus, the famous *Testimonium Flavianum* (Ant. 18.3.3) once rejected as completely a Christian interpolation by all but a few scholars, is now – stripped of its “Christianized” elements, without

recourse to tortured emendations – accepted by all but a few who remain steadfast that it is suspect (Meier, 1990a).

John the Baptist, marginalized in all Christian sources except Luke, rates a lengthy entry in the *Antiquities* (Josephus is unaware of any connection with Jesus), and later in that same work we find a succinct report on the execution of “James the brother of Jesus,” head of the Jerusalem church after Peter’s departure, in A.D. 62.

So it is remarkable that Josephus fails to mention a prominent Jew involved with James and the early church in Jerusalem c. 35-50, arrested there after a Jewish riot c.58, imprisoned at Caesarea for two years by the governor, brought to trial twice and then sent to Rome on appeal to Nero c. 60/61, and still later executed there.

Paul’s omission would be less noticeable if his own family had not been of Palestinian origin. F.F. Bruce (1980b, 236 and note #6) drew attention to Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus* 5) for evidence that Paul’s family (parents? or grandparents?) had come from the village of Gischala in Galilee.

At some point after the Roman reorganization of the East (63 B.C.) they had moved to Tarsus. Gischala is not just any village – it is precisely the home town of the rebel John of Gischala, *bête noir* for Josephus and activist in the years leading up to the war with Rome (see Cohen, 1979, pp. 70-74 and *passim*). Josephus was familiar with the region; he once stayed in the village of Cana (*Vita* 86).

We know in passing (Acts 23:16-22) that Paul’s own nephew (who is not named) had actively interceded on Paul’s behalf to thwart an ambush during Paul’s transfer from Jerusalem to Caesarea. That Paul had ultimately appealed for imperial adjudication should have been known to Josephus, then in his early 20s and resident in Jerusalem.

There is no doubt that Josephus knew about Christians; by the time he wrote (late 70s-late 90s) some of Paul’s letters and some gospels were already in circulation. He may have known Christians personally, either in Jerusalem or later in Rome, because he uses the expression *phylon Christianôn* (“tribe of Christians,” a phrase also used by Eusebius, *HE* 3.33.3) in the *Testimonium Flavianum*.

Josephus' omission of Christianity in his survey of Judaism's most important "philosophies" can only be because he considered it – at the time he wrote – no longer an organic part of Judaism. Had he been hostile to it we would know, for surely he would have said more than he did. It may be better to assume that he, like so many others of his time, felt that it rated no more than a mention.

That still leaves the problem of why Paul is not mentioned by Josephus. It is just possible that for Josephus, who moved to Italy (with his imperial patrons) a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Paul - and with him Peter – were not instrumental, either as teachers or as martyrs, in the history of Palestinian Judaism.

John the Baptist, Jesus and James lived and died – each of them put to death by a civil or religious authority – within the confines of the Jewish homeland. Like a number of other first-century Jewish compatriots of various backgrounds, they appear in Josephus always in a context of potential or actual civil disorder.

Both Paul and Peter, martyred in Rome after the great fire of A.D. 64, would have been for Josephus much less of interest. Paul was (apparently within Josephus' understanding) a diaspora Jew only obliquely connected to Palestine, and Peter a Galilean Jew resident abroad. Each became an itinerant preacher, troublesome to the long-established Jewish communities wherever he went.

The "messianic message" conveyed by Paul and Peter would have identified both as belonging to the *Christianus* "sect" that Tacitus tells us Nero blamed for burning Rome. If Josephus heard about them at all it was as troublesome alien Jews executed for treason during an imperial pogrom just a few years before the Jewish revolt. They were hardly the kind of Jews he could boast of in his publications.

Paul was acutely aware, throughout his missionary career, that he was an "outsider" within the new faith. Not only did he have the burden of his own persecutorial phase to remind him of that, but he also had not known Jesus "in the flesh." He did meet and interact with most of Jesus' immediate family, and we know from him (less so from Acts) that several of those exchanges were confrontational.



### ***The Family of Jesus:\****

The ancient debate about the relationship of Jesus to those we are told (particularly by Mark 6:3) were his “brothers and sisters” continues unabated today: “If the quest for the ‘historical Jesus’ is difficult, the quest for the ‘historical relatives of Jesus’ is nigh impossible” (Meier, 1991, p. 319). Meier’s words are perhaps more accurate and prophetic than he might have imagined.

That quotation, from part of a chapter entitled “The Immediate Family of Jesus,” was meant to warn readers about inherent problems reviewing the ancient, medieval and modern arguments for or against this or that interpretation. Meier’s views have been challenged by Bauckham (1994) and then more recently defended by Meier (1997).

The NT bears witness to several members of a remarkable family of Jews from lower Galilee who by sheer force of personality caused a seismic shock in Mediterranean religious thought during the last two thirds of the first century. We can trace, through documents of the second century and after, later generations of that same clan.

Three members of that family – Jesus of Nazareth, his brother Jacob (James), and their cousin Symeon – all suffered violent deaths within Jerusalem at the hands of either that city’s Jewish or Roman authorities (see Bauckham [1990] pp. 70-76 and *passim* [on James]; 79-94 [on Symeon]) between c. 30 and the end of the first century.

Another brother of Jesus, Jude, also prominent in the Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem, is venerated as the author of the NT letter bearing his name (Bauckham [1990] pp. 134-314). There is also the possibility that Jude and/or other “brothers of the Lord” were among the traveling missionaries outside Palestine (I Cor. 9:5).

Eusebius (*HE* 3.19-20) reports (on the authority of Hegesippus) that during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96) the Emperor had brought before him several members of the Christian community who were of “the family of David.” Among them were the grandsons of Jude, the brother of Jesus. They were interrogated and released as harmless.

Bauckham (1990, p. 60) has borrowed the term *desposynoi* (“the master’s men”) from Julius Africanus to refer to the relatives of Jesus who were

active in the early church during the first and the early second centuries. Among them he identifies (pp. 68-70) three bishops of Ctesiphon/Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in central Mesopotamia.

There were even those (e.g. Eisler, 1931, p. 590) who maintained the validity of a family connection between Jesus of Nazareth and Shimon ben Kosiba (Bar Kochba), but this seems taking relationships a bit too far (as noted in Bammel and Moule, 1984, pp. 32-37). Likewise, only the hopelessly deluded would see in the Gospel of John 5:43 – a notoriously vague statement – a prophecy relating to Bar Kochba.

Yet there is reason to believe that one other member of Jesus' family can be adduced. As late as the third century there may have been a relative of Jesus who was identified as such. Among several Christian martyrs, all executed in the time of Decius (c. 250), was a gardener named Konon from an imperial estate in Pamphylia (south-central Turkey):

*According to the acts of his martyrdom, when questioned in court as to his place of origin and his ancestry, he replied: "I am of the city of Nazareth in Galilee, I am of the family (syngeneia) of Christ, whose worship I have inherited from my ancestors, and whom I recognize as God over all things." (Bauckham [1990] p. 122).*

If this identification is authentic, Konon is the fourth known member of this extraordinary family to be executed, and may be the person to whom a grotto/martyrium (at Nazareth) was dedicated some time in the late 3rd century (Bagatti [1969] pp. 185-218; Testa [1969] pp. 112-123). The name Konon is not clearly attested in that shrine's two painted-on-plaster inscriptions or among the pilgrim graffiti.

This emphasis on the relatives of Jesus is justified (I feel) by Brown's lack of interest in the topic. The family – beginning at Pentecost – established what some say became a "caliphate" or even a "Christian Sanhedrin" (of both apostolic and dynastic authority) within the Jerusalem and Nazareth Jewish-Christian communities.

That ended with the Bar Kochba War (A.D. 130-135), and after Konon a century later there is no more reference to descendants of Jesus' family. Nevertheless, it is worthy of consideration, as the end of the second

millennium of Christianity approaches, that some direct descendants of that very family – whether or not they are aware of their venerated ancestry – are still among us as you read this.

### ***The Gospels and Acts:***

What Brown characterizes as “NT memory” or “Gospel memory” in several places throughout his *INT* infuses the five documents which collectively encapsulate the “core” of the Christian faith. Without the Gospels and Acts we would have no coherent account of how Jesus and his message was understood by the early church, and of how that *kerygma* was transmitted throughout the first-century Mediterranean. Without them as a context, the Pauline epistles and the rest of the NT would be documents of almost totally impenetrable obscurity.

### ***The Gospels (I):***

Brown identifies (107-111) three stages of Gospel formation – Jesus’ ministry, apostolic preaching, written texts – each of which corresponds to successive thirds of the first century. Surprisingly, his brief discussion of the ministry and its impact on witnesses to it omits any mention of the passion or resurrection (stage two begins with “postresurrectional appearances”)!

While there is nothing new about that schematic summary, it is worth noting that the seventy or so years that elapsed between the death of Jesus and the last of the NT is approximately the same as the time-span between the death of Muhammad in 632 and the first written accounts of his life c. 700.

Everyone interested in the NT will benefit from the excellent essay, “Jesus,” in the *NJBC* (Meier, 1990b) which summarizes what’s known and not known about the central figure of Christianity. Meier began to expand upon that article in a series of important volumes; two are published (Meier 1991; 1995) and there will probably be two more before the study is completed sometime in the next decade.

While the notion that the canonical gospels, particularly that of Matthew, were preceded by a collection of *logia* in Aramaic seems to

have no more currency, interest in the thirty Aramaic words and expressions imbedded throughout the gospels (and a Pauline letter) is still strong. On that point see Macuch (1993).

Even though there is some disagreement among the Gospels as to where Jesus' public ministry began (Galilee for the synoptics, but Judaea for John) and its geographical extent (Luke 3:1 implies that Abilene was included, a district not mentioned by the others), the locale Jesus chose is confidently circumscribed within and very near Palestine.

Already for Paul, the earliest of Christian witnesses to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus is given no "connection" with the physical world – in time or place. In the Gospel tradition, especially in Mark, there *is* such a connection, particularly in the description of where Jesus centers his ministry in Galilee.

As G.D. Kilpatrick (1982) astutely observed, nuances in Mark's Greek demonstrate that Capernaum – and a particular house therein – were "home base" for Jesus throughout his short career as itinerant prophet and healer. Nazareth may have been his *patris*, his "native" village, but once he departed it was never again his residence:

*After the baptism and temptation Jesus came to Galilee preaching, and at Mk 1:16-20 he is in the neighborhood of Capernaum. For 1:21-38 he is in Capernaum, but for 1:39-45 he is preaching in Galilee and we have suggested that in 2:1 he is in his house at Capernaum and we may infer that 2:1-3:6 takes place in Capernaum or in its neighborhood. We notice a number of recurrent features: Capernaum, the synagogue, the lakeside, the boat and apparently Jesus' home. (Kilpatrick, 1982, p. 6 = Evans & Porter, 1995, p. 16).*

Galilee was no rustic backwater of Judaism nor was it ignorant of Hellenistic influence; Capernaum was closer to one newly-founded (Tiberias) and one reconstructed (Sepphoris) center of Graeco-Roman culture than Jerusalem was to any of the older Hellenized cities on the seacoast. Capernaum was also not far from the home town of two splendid epigrammatic poets of the first century B.C.

For Meleager and Philodemus, their native Gadara (Umm Qays in northwest Jordan) was “the Athens of Syria.” Philadelphia/Amman, on the outer fringes of the Hellenistic world, maintained a modicum of urbanity into the late Roman era (MacAdam, 1992). Sidon and Tyre as well as Caesarea Maritima and Scythopolis/Bethshean were all a part of that world.

There is no evidence that Jesus visited any of them, though he couldn’t avoid traversing some of these cities’ *territoria* en route elsewhere. Collectively they exerted an enormous influence on Jews resident in Palestine. An example of just one way – Greek ethics may have been “inverted” in some Lukan aphorisms of Jesus – is suggested by J.P. Brown (1993). That is a far cry from the recent portrait of Jesus as “astral prophet” (Malina, 1997).

Even that pales beside the scenario sketched for Jesus and The Twelve by a young scholar (Vaage, 1994) who likens them to Galilean enthusiasts of Cynic philosophy. That prompted one recent observer, Charlotte Allen, to criticize Vaage’s characterization of Jesus as “a party animal” emoting platitudes to multitudes, a hippie prophet whose “.. first disciples [Vaage likens] to proto-beatniks encamped along the Sea of Galilee,” recording Jesus’ “teachings during spare moments on their travels” (Allen, 1996, p. 67).

Hengel (1989) offers a useful summary of how Hellenized Judaea and Galilee were by the first century A.D. Much more archaeological material is now available, especially for Sepphoris and Galilee in particular, and most of the Decapolis cities in general (only Dium hasn’t been identified) since Hengel’s compact survey.

Though Cana of Galilee is omitted in *INT*’s subject index, the village (and the two “signs” performed there by Jesus in the Gospel of John) are discussed in some detail (pp. 339-340; 344). Readers won’t be aware from Brown’s commentary that the episode of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) was recently characterized as Gospel fiction by Brown’s longtime friend and colleague, J.P. Meier (1995, pp. 934-950).

Once we move beyond the lifetime of Jesus there is uncertainty because we have only Acts to document when and where the Christian message spread. NT students inevitably learn, usually with surprise and some

dismay, that Eusebius in the fourth century was as limited as we are about knowledge of the earliest development of his faith outside Palestine. Brown has nothing to say about this.

That limit includes biographical or chronological information about Jesus, although Eusebius does transmit useful data on Jesus' family, and the church at Jerusalem, when we lose track of them at the abrupt and unsatisfactory conclusion of Acts. The fact remains that without the four Gospels Jesus would be no better known to us than the brief glimpses given by Paul, Josephus, and other sources.

### ***The Fall of Jerusalem/The Destruction of the Temple:\****

For Muslim tradition the founding of the Umayyad Dynasty seems to have been the defining moment of Islam's identity in the world outside the Arabian peninsula. It is exactly then (in the 660s and after) that documenting the life and times of the Prophet became of paramount interest as the new faith severed the ties – except for a special link with Mecca and Medina – with its own spiritual matrix.

In like manner the scholarly consensus holds that the defining moment of Christian tradition is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 and the subsequent clear distinction between Christians and Jews – both with regard to each other, as well as with regard to each by the Roman authorities – in the diaspora communities. Yet that very event – if indeed it really was decisive – is nowhere clearly stated or depicted in the words or images of NT documents (Duggan, 1997).

That puzzling omission is twice noted in *JNT*: “The failure of NT works to make specific and detailed mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is very hard to explain” (p. 163 note 93) and again “we admit that the absence of an indisputable, specific, clear Gospel (or indeed, NT) reference to the destruction of the Temple as having taken place remains a problem...” (p. 273 note 102).

There has been no shortage of attempts to show that *allusions* to the fall of Jerusalem are in the NT; Luke (19:43-44) is favored above most others. If Luke is indeed aware of Jerusalem's fate, it is strange indeed that he omits even that indirect reference to it in Acts (on the likely date of Acts, see below).

The solution to that problem is not, as J.A.T. Robinson (1976) proposed, to assume that the entire NT corpus dates from before the fall of Jerusalem. It would certainly help if we knew from which of the Mediterranean communities the various canonical documents came, in order to assess the degree to which Christian/Jewish populations were affected.

More recently Carsten Thiede and Matthew d'Ancona (1996) have argued that papyrus fragments of Matthew's Gospel now at Oxford's Magdalen College must be dated to the 50s of the first century by comparison with dated documents from Qumran and Italy. Acceptance of their proposal is rare (e.g. Duggan, 1997, pp. 48-49); Brown's acute skepticism (p. 164 n. 95; see also MacAdam, 1997) is more realistic.

Surely it's worth considering that if we didn't have Josephus' *Jewish War* (understandably a biased source), our information would be limited and very muted in comparison. If the destruction of the Temple rates no more than oblique (or opaque) references in the NT, it is given equally scant attention in contemporary Jewish sources.

That observation should be even more disconcerting, but isn't (this whole matter is admirably reviewed in Lampe (1984, esp. pp. 154-155). The first explicit Christian statement about the destruction of Jerusalem is in the Epistle of Barnabas (early second century?): "Because [the Jews] went to war [the Temple] was torn down by their enemies" (*Ep. Bar.* 16.4).

What is left to deal with is an argument from silence. Whether we like it or not, we can't ignore it: "Arguments from silence can not stand in isolation; they take their place and have their force in conjunction with the discussion, interpretation, and evaluation of every [other] relevant piece of evidence and argument" (Styler, 1984, p. 103). NT "silence" is loud enough to create an audible echo.

One new piece of evidence regarding the impact of the Jewish War on the topography of Rome was made possible recently through an ingenious bit of epigraphic restoration. Geza Alföldy reconstructed most of the original Latin dedicatory inscription of the Colosseum. The words, in bronze letters affixed to the stonework with pins, were lost when a later inscription recording restoration work replaced them.

Alföldy reasoned that the pin-holes remaining from the earlier underlying text were clues to the shape of its letters; his tracing of them recovered the words of an early Flavian dedication. Titus' source of the funds needed to construct the Colosseum became clear: *amphitheatrum [novum?] ex manubis [feri ivssit?]*. The *manubiae* or money gained by sales of spoils of a conflict must be those derived from the Jewish War just brought to its conclusion with the minting of *Judaea Capta* coinage (Millar, 1998 and ZPE 109 [1995] 195).

### ***The Gospels (II):***

*INT* gives each of the Gospels a brief, systematic examination, though Luke/Acts is treated as one work and the Gospel of John is examined with the three Johannine letters. This follows a pattern: General Analysis of the Message, Sources, Authorship, Community or Locale Involved, Date of Writing, Issues & Problems for Reflection, and Bibliography.

Brown's approach is judicious and even refreshingly candid. In reference to Papias on the origins of Mark, he summarizes: "Ancient traditions often have elements of truth in garbled form" (p. 161). His discussion of sources for passages unique to Luke concludes with a footnote that reads in part:

*Granted that Luke drew on those sources, he may well have composed some parables and/or miracle-stories in imitation of those in the sources (p. 266 note 81).*

While his discussion (p. 133) of the Gerasene demoniac would have been aided by a reference (Johnson, 1998) too recent to include, we may wonder why Sir William Ramsay's major works aren't cited in the bibliography for Acts (331-2) – but do appear elsewhere in *INT* (see the Index, s.v.).

Readers may turn with interest to Brown's discussion of John's christology compared to that in the Synoptics (p. 339) and for his own views on the sacramental aspects of John (p. 378) or for his strongly-held conviction that Christianity has been a "corrective" influence on imperialism (p. 310 note 75).



Yet somehow John gets lost in Brown's tribute to the influence of the Gospel of Mark on later Christian thought:

*To appreciate what this earliest preserved written portrayal contributed to our Christian heritage, one might reflect on what we would know about Jesus if we had just the letters of Paul. We would have a magnificent theology about what God has done in Christ, but Jesus would be left almost without a face (pp. 157-8).*

Implicit is that Brown finds the Jesus sketched in the Gospel of John to be far more of a theological construct than a historical person. Yet as "authentic" as Mark's portrait of Jesus may appear, the background against which he is set might be less convincing.

One eminent Roman historian put it this way: "If any one of the Gospels can bring us closer to the historical context and the overall pattern of Jesus' activities than the others, it is John rather than any of the Synoptics" (Millar [1990] p. 355).

That statement is all the more interesting when the underlying structure and purpose of the Gospel of John is scrutinized with the Johannine community in mind. Too recent for Brown to include in his discussion is McGrath (1997) on the apologetic motif of the passion narrative in the Gospel of John.

When we turn from the Gospels to the rest of the NT literature it is customary to begin with Acts, because it is the only organic link between the "biographies" of Jesus and the "biography" of the early church.

Students won't realize how invaluable Acts is until they begin to read Chapter I of Eusebius of Caesarea's *History of the Church* (c. A.D. 325) and discover that its author – although a Palestinian and knowledgeable of local topography – really knew less about what happened there in the first century A.D. than we do.

*(To be continued in next Issue)*