

Satan in the Evolution of Christianity I

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Updated: Wednesday, 24 March 2004

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A Religion of Conflict

Satan or the Devil, a negative god, is an important part of Christianity, although quite why is hard to fathom. God is described as almighty but is not almighty enough to get rid of His evil opponent until the end of time. The reason is quite plain, although no Christians realize it. Satan is Time. Time is the great corrupter, eventually the ultimate corrupter of life, because given time, all life dies. The punishment God inflicted on the human race through the disobedience of Adam and Eve was death, and the promised reward for obedience to the Christian creed is eternal life. Yet eternity can only be experienced in a world without time, and so it assumes the cessation of time. The supposed kingdom of God is a place of complete perfection, in which nothing corrupts. But time is the corrupter and so time has ceased in the Christian heaven.

In this one paragraph, the concept of the Devil has been explained. Why go on? Christians never like answers that explain things. They always like answers that are mysterious, and leave the faithful still puzzling. They attribute this to the wonder of God, and is the reason they hate science. The Devil has been the most important aspect of Christian discipline for two millennia, and in most of this time, his threat was so fearful that the only salvation from it was to hide behind Christ, like an infant hiding behind its grandmother's skirts. In other words the threat of Satan was far more real than the salvation of Jesus, even though the Christian was told that Satan was really cowed in defeat by the resurrection of Christ. Latterly, many churches have been embarrassed by the notion of such a triumphant Devil. They realise that God ought to be able to squash Satan like a troublesome mosquito, and free the world of his machinations, but chooses not to do so. This is not good news for Christians and so the Devil is not spoken of as much as he once was.

The inclination of the more advanced churches to reject the Devil as an actually existing supernatural principle of evil in favour of being just a symbol of the wickedness in men, though it seems sensible, does not incline them also to reject Jesus as simply a symbol of goodness. The point of the myth would be that goodness struggles and seems to lose but much particular good is done in the struggle and goodness eventually re-emerges to live on with a greater good coming out of it. Christians are now too deeply attached to their didactic myth being a historical supernatural fact for them now to reject it for the more sensible and more meaningful interpretation. They will reject the Devil as being too medieval, too primitive and too difficult to sustain when God is supposed to be utterly good and omnipotent. Jesus Christ cannot be rejected, though. He really is the son of God. He is not just a Harvey the Rabbit for incompletely developed mentalities as some say! No Christians can contemplate all the posters outside churches saying, "Jesus Lives!" being wrong.

The excessive spallation of Christian unity into myriads of sects has given Satan a bit of living room, particularly American fundamentalists who continue to make a lot of Satan. They like to promote military and murderous ideas of God's vengeance against His enemy and His Satanic supporters, namely anyone who disagrees with them or that they don't like. These people are dangerous and perhaps insane, and by any just reckoning, are the Satanic ones, they are so intolerant of everyone else. They illustrate the problem of Christianity from the outset. It began as intolerance and remains intolerant at its core still. The reason is that it was devised as a religion of conflict from the start.

A Cosmic Battle

It arose from the treatment of Jews by the Romans from 63 BC until 136 AD. Jews were treated much as the Arabs are treated by the Americans today. It is one of God's jokes, no doubt, that the Herodians of today are the Israelis who claim to be the descendants of the original Jewish inhabitants dispersed by the Romans in 136. Occupied people have few rights but have to be grateful to their oppressors for ruling them for no more reward than their natural assets. The people are treated with contempt by the imperial power, and any lack of gratitude by them is rewarded with a harsh and heavy hand. Despite the cruel biblical gloss that Jesus was the enemy of the Jews and the friend of the Romans, the truth is revealed in the last book of the Christian bible, **Revelation**. Rome is allegorized as a Great harlot and a Satanic beast harassing the poor Christians just as it had the Jews.

The earliest gospel, **Mark**, has the innocent Jesus facing up to the Romans and their collaborators among the Jews, the priesthood and the Sanhedrin. The myth is depicted as Good versus Evil, Christ versus the Devil, and it begins in **Mark** straight after Jesus's baptism when the spirit of God in the shape of a dove descended upon him from heaven, denoting his commission by God as the saviour on earth. For forty days, the cosmic battle of Good and Evil raged in the wilderness, standing for the forty years Essenes considered it really to have been raging until then. The beginning of the ministry of Jesus was thought to be the climax of the battle.

The gospels tell the story of this final battle in the cosmic war of Good and Evil. Jesus was always victorious against the Devils he met, and plainly expected God's heavenly armies to arrive, as prophesied, from the Mount of Olives to begin the purification of the world of Evil. Jesus thought the corrupt world would end the night he sat till dawn praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. It did not, and he was crucified, an apparent victory for the Devil, but one which his disciples then turned into a victory for God. Jesus rose from the dead, the victor. A victory over death was a victory over the inevitability of time—a victory over Satan. Time and death did not inevitably win. Christians believe it still, 2000 years later.

The Jewish Satan

The popular Christian name for the principle of Evil that Jesus fought against is Satan, a Jewish word that means "an opponent", and written as a proper name means "The Opponent". In the Jewish scriptures, this "opponent" does not usually appear with an initial capital letter except conventionally in **Job**. God's "satans" are His assistants sent to oppose humanity for their disobedience or vanity, but naturally they were not God's opponents, and nor is the one in **Job**, although there he seems to be successfully manipulating God.

The Satan of **Job** is a son of God, interpreted by contemporary theologians as an angel, there being only one god, but originally sons of God were gods. God was El, the Canaanite high god, and his sons were the various powers of nature and the senior gods of the various nations of the Canaanite race. In this scheme, Jews considered Yehouah to be the god of the nations of Israel and Judah, although the word Israel seems to mean "we are the seed (or sons) of El", declaring them to be the direct children of the high god. Anyway, the Satan of Job has the task of roaming the earth, a pun on the word "satan" which, however, suggests a link with the spies or prophets who commonly infiltrated the people looking and listening for dissent. The Assyrians and Persians had such people, and doubtless the Romans too. Paul was one. From his observations of humanity, Satan does not trust that Job, an apparently utterly devout man, is sincere, and urges God to test him, confident that Job will quickly succumb to the tests. God agrees, and Satan tests Job to the limits of human endurance—doubtless a useful precedent for the Christian torturers of witches and heretics in the European middle ages. Satan is here an opponent of humanity, but can only do what God permits him to do.

Perhaps a more significant mention of Satan is in **Zechariah** 3:1-2, where the opponent stands up for the natives of Yehud who were left behind when the leaders of Judah were sent into Babylonian exile. These Am ha Eretz were treated as strangers by the "returners" to the land, the Persian colonists. So, the genuine Judahites were depicted as the opponents of the false Judahites sent in by the imperial power, and proof of it was that their god was Satan, not Yehouah. Job is considered to be a Phœnician

work, and Phœnicia and Yehud became politically part of the same entity when they were joined together in the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara just about the time when the temple state of Yehud was set up.

The internal division within the population of the artificial state continued unabating with ramifications that will never be clear. The deportation of foreigners into the small country having the authority of rulers caused an on-going dissension between them and the people who had lived there before. The Edomites were an Arab people displaced causing a long-term enmity. The Am ha Eretz were refused full citizenship except under the terms of the colonists. Some separated out eventually forming the Samaritan sect. Yehud became a fractious and distrusting society, and continued to split politically for centuries. Mutual hatred became a norm.

The defeat of the Persians by the Greeks introduced new reasons for dissension and distrust. The opponents of the temple priesthood could use modernisation as a reason for attacking the Persian colonists. Alexander's generals were spreading Greek ways in the cultural change now called Hellenisation. But initially the Ptolemies were favourable to the temple, and poured aid and assistance into it, as a barrier against the Seleucids, adding substantially to Jewish myths—including the Exodus from Egypt—and translating them into Hebrew and Greek. The Seleucids then took over Palestine, and the situation was reversed. The old priesthood associated with the Egyptians were surely evicted, and new Greek-inclined priests, later called Sadducees, were installed. The traditional Persian parties were incensed, defended the traditional forms of the religion, and eventually rebelled in the Maccabean revolt. It is presented as a national uprising against an oppressive occupying power, the Seleucid Greeks of Babylonia, but was at least equally a civil war.

The rebels, the religious traditionalists, eventually won the war but only by allying themselves with Rome, the new Hellenistic force that had arisen in the west, that had cunningly used the Jewish rebels to undermine the power of the Seleucid Greeks of Babylonia to further Roman geopolitical ambitions. The Hasmoneans effectively were a Roman dependency and had to adopt Roman ways, gravely disappointing their traditionalist supporters, the Hasids. To secure their own power and, more important, to assure the Romans that the country could not revert to favouring Roman enemies to the east, the Hasmoneans took the priesthood for themselves, completely reversing the supposed purpose of the revolt which was to return the priesthood to the traditional priestly families, and thus re-establish the religion as it was. The inevitable result of this was further spallation in Jewish society. The Hasids split into a conservative faction and a progressive faction. It is likely that the Hasidic party had the nickname, Pharisees, meaning Persians, and the conservative faction, disillusioned, split from them in disgust becoming the Essenes, apparently meaning the Salvationists. So, in the second century BC, the main philosophies of the Jews, described over 200 years later by Josephus had been established, and so too had the other sects and dissenting peoples met in the New Testament, except the Herodians who were yet to come.

The Persian Religion

What has it all to do with Satan? The Persian religion was the very source of the idea of Satan. It was dualist in having two opposed gods, a Good Spirit and a Wicked Spirit—Ahuramazda and Ahriman. The colonists had been sent into Yehud with the task of moulding the old and popular Canaanite god, Yehouah, into a type of Ahuramazda, a god acceptable to the Persians in being a universal god of obedience and good order. That was why the local people, the Am ha Eretz, could have no say in the “restoring” of the worship of the old god. It was not the old worship restored but a new god worshipped under the old name and with a purpose that suited the imperialists. The line they took towards the local people was that God had abandoned them as apostates, idolaters and sinners! They were the opponents of anything that God desired, and the explanation of that was that their god was the opponent god or Satan. Just as Ahriman opposed Ahuramazda, so too did Satan oppose Yehouah. Those who stood out against the Persian colonists were the human agents or dupes of the opponent god, Satan, against Yehouah.

Peter Stanford, a Catholic writer (**The Devil**, 1996), accepts that the Persian religion has influenced Judaism and Christianity, but claims “the time scale allows for two way traffic, and it is never entirely

clear who is influencing whom". It is the usual special pleading that ought bluntly to be called what it really is—lying. The time scale he means is the biblical one that puts Moses some time in 1400 BC, 600 years before there is any sign of a state in Samaria other than Canaanite city states. The epic of Moses was not actually written in its present form until about 300 BC. Christians and Jews think the "return from exile" happened under the Persian king, Cyrus, about 540 BC. It actually happened about 420 BC, but both dates are long before **Exodus** and **Numbers** were written, so the Jewish religions depends on the Persian one and not the reverse. Not only that, it is quite clear who influenced whom from the coherence of the respective theologies. Persian theology is coherent, whereas the Jewish one is full of puzzles and gaps that the Persian religion can answer. The Persian religion was incompletely transferred to Yehud—the task permanently stopped by the defeat of Persia by Alexander.

The needs of the Persians was for a universal god, whereas when the Hasmoneans secured the free state of Judah in the second century, they needed a national god. Moreover, a national god had to be able to succeed at anything, so could not possibly have an equal god that could foil him at anything! The dualist idea did not suit the Hasmonaeans, obliged now to recognize their dependence on Hellenistic culture. The national god would have been opposed by a universal evil spirit—plainly an unequal comparison—and the Hellenistic culture did not entertain such a universal evil principle. The evil spirit was therefore downgraded into an angel, a mere creature of the Good God, and being His servant. The traditionalists went some way along with this, to nationalize Yehouah, but made Satan into a rebel angel—the supernatural equivalent of the Am ha Eretz—so that he was no longer just a servant of God but created evil in his own right, a much closer parallel with the original because this Satan could not be defeated until the Eschaton, just like Ahriman.

Satan has never got rid of this ambiguity in his nature under Christianity. Is he subject to God's will and merely troubling humanity because God wants to test their faith, or is he a genuinely independent spirit not subject to God's will, and whom God cannot defeat willy-nilly but only at the end of time? The Persian faction had its own literary tradition in which the apocalyptic was much more important than it is in modern Judaism, and this came to us most clearly through the Essenes, while the Hasmoneans, constrained by the practicalities of politics could not accept Satan as anything other than the executor of temporary punishments for transgressions. This came down to us through the Pharisees and then Rabbinic Judaism.

Eventually, after a series of wars between the Jews and the Romans, the Romans solved the problem by closing the temple, banning Jews from Jerusalem and dispersing them all over the world. The dispersion was made all the larger from the fact that the Phœnicians and the Syrians were all loyal to the Jerusalem temple and its god by this time, all of them being people of the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara that the temple had been set up to serve. The Pharisee party now effected a major revision away from the traditional position. Dualism was dropped, the battle of God and Evil on a cosmic level was erased, Satan was established merely as a rebel angel, and all apocalyptic ideas were expunged or watered down.

Rabbinic Judaism was quite a different religion from what it had been originally, and even different from Pharisaism, except in that it remained liberal in outlook. Jews concentrated on the central understanding of Zoroaster—people manifest good and evil, not supernatural beings. Jews called the inclination to do evil "yetzer hava", and modern Judaism bases God's role in a personal struggle with evil on the assistance that God has to offer. Yet, the Jewish Qabala which emerged about 1150, once again, in Provence, had retained the dualism of the Jewish religion before Jamna, where Rabbinic Judaism was devised. In the Sefiroth of the Qabala, ten good principles are set against ten wicked ones. The Rabbis had not succeeded in getting rid of Satan. The form of Judaism that was closer to the original was Essenism, and it became Christianity. So the Persian traditions of dualism and apocalyptic, no longer prominent in Judaism, passed into Christianity, and still characterises the religion today. Christianity is more true to Zoroastrianism than Rabbinic Judaism, though both have the same roots.

The story of a rebellious angel is hardly coherent, and certainly not convincing, when heaven is meant to be a perfect place, and several versions of it were devised. One was that the rebellious angels were sex-mad and came to earth to screw human women. Judaism was excessively prudish, and both Christianity and Judaism frowned on sexuality, so the idea of heavenly beings having the wherewithal for sex provided for them by God seems strange. Angels are immortal and had no need of sexual tackle, as

Jesus knew himself and said (Mk 12:25), so this explanation is dire. No doubt human women could have had psychological sex with an angel, an explanation of female wet dreams, and perhaps a woman's explanation of getting mysteriously pregnant, just as the Virgin Mary did after she had been visited by an angel. Nor was she the first in the bible:

There was a certain man of Zorah whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of Yehouah appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not, but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son... Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me... and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife...

Judges 13:2-3,6,9-11

Would your average Protestant husband—or father of a daughter—be like Manoah?

In another story, both Satan and the archangel Michael are sons of God, but Satan rebels against his father, creates the material world, and plants humans on it. Later Michael appears on earth as a saviour called Christ sent by God. This was a version favoured by gnostics but might have been the original one, being certainly akin to the creation of the two spirits in Zoroastrianism. A related version has God making Adam and Eve then calling his two sons, Satan and Michael to admire His work. Michael kneels before them in admiration but Satan is too proud to do so, because they were inferior creations to himself, and thus rebels.

A key point of the revision of Persian dualism into an imperfect monism is that Satan is originally one of us—one of the good creations of God. He is like us but rebels. It is easy to see this as a warning to the people of the Yehud colony after the creation of Judaism, and in the fractured society of Judah for the next 500 years. No Jew could even trust his brother, and this perfectly matched the myth of one of God's own sons rebelling against his father and the rest of the heavenly society. Jew against Jew was a reflexion of angel against angel in heaven.

Jubilees and **1 Enoch** seem to have been written in response to the loss of the Jerusalem priesthood by the traditional priests of the introduced Persian religion, perhaps around 130 BC when the Hasmoneans refused to hand it back. In the gnostic **Pistis Sophia**, the books of leou (Yehouah) were dictated by God to Enoch in paradise and preserved from destruction in the deluge. **1 Enoch** explains God's plan of the world. It is a conducted tour of the cosmos showing the poor state it is in. The book is not Christian but has doctrines of the sects which appeared as competitors of Christianity. The sons of God of **Genesis** who constitute the court of the High God, El, were cast out of heaven through lust, initiating the link between sex and evil deeply ingrained in Christian morality. Sex is a function of the transience of life. Heavenly bodies are immortal and have no need of it, and sex was seen as a necessary product of the evil agent—time itself—Satan! Paul links Satan directly with the sexual act (**1 Cor 7:5**). **Jubilees** makes sure the Hasmonaeans' new national God, Yehouah, is supreme by having Him allow a tenth of the wicked angels to remain active tempting human beings. Their leader was Mastema, but evil is tied to God, the Wicked Ones being answerable to Him, thus destroying the dualistic explanation of theodicy.

Various wicked spirits are named, unless they are just different names of the same one as magicians thought. The apotropaic scapegoat ritual of **Leviticus 16:8-10** is another indication of dualism in the Jewish scriptures. The two goats were selected by lots and one sacrificed to Yehouah as a sin offering while the other is driven off to carry away the sins of the people to a devil called Azazel, a devil also in Islam. The god of war at Urfa is Asis, the Mighty One. Balaziz is Mighty Lord, and Roshaziz, the head of the Mighty One, is a promontory on the Phoenician coast. So, Azazel means "Might of El", a complementary sounding name but another reference to the struggle in Yehud between the El and Yahu factions, the victorious Yehouah faction here besmirching the El faction into a desert demon fed on sin. Belial appears in **1 Samuel 25:17** and **30:22** seeming to mean something ignoble, becoming Satan

(2 Cor 6:5). If it is read as “My Lord is El”, it is again a besmirching by the victorious faction. Others were Satanael, Sammael and Semiyaz.

In **Tobit** (150 BC), an evil spirit called Asmodi or Aeshma Daeva, indicating a Persian origin, tries to prevent Sarah’s marriage, because he is in love with her himself. In the **Talmud**, Asmodi develops into the demon of lust.

In **The Book of the Watchers**, part of **1 Enoch**, God appointed watcher angels to watch the world. It is a myth that matches the Persian period, but probably most societies that followed them. Spies were used by the shahs of Persia, but the reference here is again to the Persian priests. These Watchers saw the delights of human women, lusted after them, and finally 200 under the leadership of Semihazah (Semiyaz) rebelled against divine order by violating the women procreating a race of giants called Nephilim, sounding like the Greek Titans. However, they became demons. God had to send four good angels, Uriel, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael to cast the Nephilim into the pit, originally an allegory of priests sent from Persia like Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah. Another story woven into this one in **1 Enoch** is that of Azazel who shows humans the art of metallurgy, and therefore how weapons and jewelry could be made, tempting men into warfare and women into vanity, through adornments.

These stories have a suspiciously Greek stamp on them and will have been elaborated in the Hellenistic period. Greeks and Romans thought that exceptional human beings like kings and heroes were demi-gods, the fruit of Gods impregnating human women. Alexander the Great is an example. Gods and humans could interbreed but the Jewish angle is that the produce of such liaisons were giants which became demons. Greek gods like Orpheus showed humans how to do things, but again the Jewish angle was that these were demons, not God! Nothing could be better evidence that the Christian birth narratives were not Jewish in concept at all but Hellenistic. The new god of Christianity was born in a way that Jewish myth suggested was demonic. The interference the Jewish God had with human fertility was simply to open a womb that had seemed closed, but that is where it ceased. The Jesus of **Matthew** and **Luke** could only be demonic—one of the Nephilim.

The Book of Watchers may express a moral view rather than an ethnic one, harking back to the universality of the Persian religion, but over stamped with the nationalistic one of the Hasmonaean period. The Persian colonists were not an ethnos, but, although their culture was not negotiable, anyone willing to accept it was acceptable into it. Ezra was rejecting wives not over race but over religion. It was not acceptable for Jews to marry outside of their religion. As long as the wives became Jewish in religion, they were acceptable. Then they were no longer foreign. Initially people were accepted into the new Jewish cultus by accepting its moral teaching, not on the basis of where they had been born. Quite the opposite. Those who had been born in Judah when the “returners” “returned” were banned from helping to “restore” the religion. Ezra refused to let “returners” marry unconverted locals. Only the Persian morality was the right one.

Enoch has been called the Jewish Zoroaster, and seems to be an archetypal man who walked with God, although he now barely appears in **Genesis** at all. Once he must have been much more important, and the Essenes—most Persian in theology—treasured the books listed under his name. He walked with God, suggesting he was a god, or a son of God. Since the original High God was El, and Yehouah was a son of El, Enoch might have been another name for Yehouah. Both stood for the annual cycle of the sun. Enoch lived for 365 years, a year for each day in a year, suggesting that he was a god of the year just as Yehouah was. God, as the god of the year, like Enoch, and Satan were gods of time! He seems to be an earlier myth than even Abraham, and certainly than the Moses of the extended version we now have.

The author of **Watchers** is not concerned with these traditions. He addresses all people, not just Israel, and sees God’s law as a broad law of nature and justice, a Persian notion, then mocks Greek ideas—the formerly Holy Watchers defiling themselves dallying with human women. Here is surely a condemnation of the priesthood, considered to be akin to angels, if not angels already, in the traditional view, but under the Greek regimes, acting like Greek gods by sexually relating with profane women. The nation are sheep beset by raptors, but some of the sheep are blind, refusing to see what is happening, and therefore leaving themselves open to the consequences of allowing wolves into the sheep pen.

They are admitting Satan.

The Book of Jubilees, written about the time of the Maccabean revolt, identifies the collaborating Jews with the gentiles, as would be expected. All are the subjects of Satan, but they are judged according to Persian criteria, by thoughts, words and deeds, not by the deceitful idea of mere faith or belief. Any traitor could **say** they believed in the traditional religion, but only those who **proved it** by deeds could be believed. To be judged as righteous, people had to **be** righteous. Merely believing in God could not be sufficient. That could only have been a Satanic ruse.

Essenes

Satan was manifestly more important to the Jews at the time of the gospel events than the impression left by the present revision of the Jewish scriptures. Satan is mentioned repeatedly by the scribes and the people of Israel in the synoptic gospels, by the apostles, especially by Paul, and often in **Revelation**. It seems that the Essenes were closer to the original Judaism than Rabbinic Judaism is now.

The Essenes placed the cosmic struggle of God and Evil at the center of their world outlook. They were preparing themselves for that war which is why they practised chastity—sexual activity was forbidden to soldiers in wartime. Essenes were Sons of Light, and were led by the Prince of Light. Their enemies, gentile oppressors and the apostate and hypocritical Jews who helped them, were led by Satan, the Prince of Darkness. The Sons of Light were waiting to help the heavenly hosts in the Day of God's Vengeance, when the armies of God would destroy all wickedness in the world. Elaine Pagels, in **The Origin of Satan** (1995), explains:

The Essenes offer the closest parallel to Mark's account of Jesus' followers, as they invoke images of cosmic war to divide the universe at large... between God's people and Satan's.

Moreover, Jesus's idea was that the kingdom of God would be an inversion of material existence, and thus the injustice of the material world would be rectified. Dives and Lazarus changed places:

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Luke 16:25

The first would be last and the last first (Mr 9:35; 10:31). This reflects precisely Essene ideas of precedence based on humility and servitude to God, not on grandeur or superiority. The implication in both Christian and Essene notions is that justice in this wicked world is inverted.

Pagels cannot bring herself, despite this, to identify these two groups, because she thinks the Essenes were too exclusive. What she and most Christian commentators miss, often through holding the telescope to their blind eye, is the **Messianic Rule** (Geza Vermes) discovered at Qumran (Barthélemy's **Rule of the Congregation**) which is unequivocal that at the End Time the Essenes were required to be evangelical. They were to give all Israel a last chance to change their sinful ways. The very first rule of the two column fragment remaining is the "Rule of the Congregation" by which Barthélemy named the whole fragment:

This is the Rule of all the Congregation of Israel in the Last Days, when they are called to join the Community to live by the law of the Sons of Zadok, the priests and the men of their Covenant who turned aside from the way of the people, the men of His Council who kept His Covenant amidst iniquity, offering atonement for the land.

When they come, they shall assemble them all, women and children also, and read into their ears all the precepts of the Covenant and shall instil in them all their statutes that they may no longer sin in error.

There is no doubt that the Essenes expected the Jews to flock to the righteous party at the End Time. It is mentioned again in the **Nahum Pesher**, and this “Rule of the Congregation” implies that the community had to call them, or “mobilise” them to use the word of Wise, Abegg and Cook (**Dead Sea Scrolls**). It describes what had to be done to the penitents. They had to have the rules read out loud to them. **The Messianic Scroll** is describing nothing other than the Sermon on the Mount! **The Messianic Rule** is the scroll fragment that tells us clearly that the first Christians were the repentant Jews called by the Essenes in the End Time.

The archangel Michael is the Prince of Light for the Essenes, and prominent scholars like Yigal Yadin and John Collins say so:

In 1QM, Michael is no longer simply the Prince of Israel but leader of the Sons of Light.

John Collins, The Apocalyptic Imagination

Column 17 of the **War Scroll** is plain enough that Michael is the Prince of Light battling against the Prince of Wickedness. The Essenes considered themselves as “Israel”—the pure remnant! God’s angel stood for them, but any one of All Israel, the whole body of apostate and hypocritical Jews, could sincerely repent, be baptised and be received into the community (yahad). They would have the rules read to them, sufficing for the normal three years’ novitiate. The calling of All Israel implies then that there is no longer time for a novitiate to be completed. The End must have been expected within three years. It is not curious then that Jesus is said to have conducted a three years ministry. It will be because the Men of Renown who led the Essenes had decided that the End was due within three years that John the Baptist and then Jesus had been sent out. Note that the Rule cited includes women and children, a point constantly ignored by Christians who want to find a significant difference between the all male society of the Essenes and the first Christians. Elaine Pagels for example repeats this male myth several times in her book, **The Origin of Satan**.

Gentiles

Gentiles were **not** included. The confusion arises from the status of Hellenised Jews of which there were a lot. The most Hellenised of them will have led lives that were gentile in culture. Yet they were Jews, and given the financial clout most will have wanted to sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple at Passover as a sort of minimum level of commitment. It seems certain that many of the tourists or pilgrims visiting Jerusalem at Passover—and Josephus makes it several million, doubtless exaggerating but showing it was a lot—were anything but devout Jews. They were the ones mentioned in the Rule of the Congregation in the Last Days, and so were entitled to salvation through repentance should they choose it. These were the “Greeks” of the **Acts of the Apostles**, the apostate and Hellenised Jews, in fact, who were counterpoised against the “Hebrews”, the Jews who were still practising correctly.

The **New Testament** strongly suggests that the new Judaism was carried beyond Judaea by these tourist Jews who had been converted and baptised by the Nazarenes, and probably were involved in the overthrow of Jerusalem described in the gospels as “the sedition” and “the insurrection”. It was led by one Jesus Barabbas, a man that the crowds were calling for when Jesus the Nazarene was under arrest!

Thoroughly assimilated Jews could not have been distinguished from gentiles, and they will have had many gentile friends, some of whom would have been “Godfearers”, gentiles who practised Judaism in every possible respect other than to convert formally. Here was an overlap of gentiles who behaved as pious Jews but did not have the courage to convert, mainly because men had to be circumcised, and apostate Jews who returned from their pilgrimage with news of the coming End, and the teaching of its prophet, who had been cruelly crucified by the authorities. These impious Jews had repented and been baptised, becoming Nazarenes and being prepared for the Parousia, the final return of Michael the archangel in the guise of the prophet Jesus—now honoured with the title, Christ—and the armies of heaven, ready to overcome all wickedness and corruption in the world. Godfearing gentiles wanted to be saved too, and this is where opportunists like Paul stepped in. Seeing a demand, the wily merchant satisfied it. He admitted them without circumcision, receiving a lot of money—for the Jerusalem Church,

of course!—in gratitude.

All of this is rational, explicable in terms of the history of the times as it is known, requires no supernatural explanations, shows how Christianity spread into the empire independently of Paul, and shows how his decision to admit gentiles was quite understandable. Christians, Jews or Greeks, were thus admitted into the ranks of those who were to be saved a few years hence when Jesus arrived with the hosts of heaven dressed as Michael the archangel to sweep away his brother, Satan. Those who had lived righteously, and those who had repented and been baptised in time, were saved. They were Israel. No one else was. That is why gentile Christians could justifiably call themselves Israel, and orthodox Jews could not, in Essene terms. It shows the origins of Christianity in Essenism.

John's fierce polemic against those he sometimes calls simply "the Jews" at times matches in bitterness that of the Essenes.

E Pagels

Christian commentators often seem reluctant to see that Christianity was barely ever Jewish. Of course, its roots were in Essenism, but the failure of Jesus as Messiah left the main Essene organisation as it was, poring over the Jewish scriptures in their idiosyncratic way to find out what had gone wrong with their prophecies of when the End would be. The followers of Jesus, who was an Essene, were that mixture of collaborating Palestinian Jews and Hellenised Jews that had believed the Nazarene's message of the imminent End. They explained the disappearance of the corpse as the fulfilment of Jesus's prophecy that they would rise in three days, the prophecy of a general resurrection in Hosea, and suddenly thought it signified the coming End, Jesus being the first to rise.

The leading Essenes of the community will have been the ones who removed the corpse, for a proper burial, and would have known it was not a resurrection. The main Essene leaders seem unlikely to have wanted to abandon those who had flocked to join Jesus and had perhaps helped in the insurrection. It might have been a mistake that had happened before without such dire consequences, in that the signs had not remained so auspicious until the very night of the miracle expected at the Mount of Olives, and the plan had been abandoned in time to avoid embarrassment. The people who had repented would then have been given the chance to join the Essenes as an associate of the kind the village Essenes seemed to be. Their repentance was valid so long as they remained righteous, and they had an incentive to lead generally righteous lives. They were the reason for the **Damascus Document**, a rule showing how an ordinary Essene should live uncorrupted in the wicked world. Conceivably, these Essenes already of the villages and urban camps, who married, might also not have been in the know, and continued in hope. It will have been the *raison d'être* of the Jerusalem Church, run by the Essenes for those who continued to believe in Jesus.

What seems different in this case is the fact that the signs led Jesus so far into the prophecy, causing his converting large numbers of foreign Hellenised Jews, plus the unexpected fact that they thought he had been resurrected when the main body of Essenes removed his body. These generally apostate Jews saw it as their last chance to stay within the bounds of Judaism, with the End due soon. They had heard and believed all the explanations given by Jesus of the coming End, and nothing seemed much different to them still, save that the crucifixion and resurrection must have been the initiation of the forty years of cosmic struggle not the culmination of it. Jesus had been a persuasive man, and no journeyman Essene could persuade them he had been wrong. They just had to provide for this unexpected multitude of unorthodox believers, while those who returned to their foreign homes had an amazing story to tell!

These Jews—anonymous ones—took the gospel into the Roman empire initially, and Christian missionaries like Paul followed, although it is plain from **Acts** and the **Epistles** that the Jerusalem Church had no enthusiasm for Paul's self-appointed task. Churches were already established when Paul arrived in the Greek lands, and even in Rome, but there was dissension between devout traditional Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah, and the apostate Jews who had returned with this message that a Messiah had come, had forgiven their sins, and would return soon. They had been guaranteed entry into God's kingdom, through repentance and baptism, and so long as they did not sin until the return they

would be saved. That is why, even though Jesus's initial following must have been Jewish, they were not recognized by the synagogues. Even if the synagogue Jews were Essenes themselves, as many might have been since they had the **Damascus Rule** to keep them safe in the wicked world, they could not have accepted those who rejected even the relaxed rules of the *Damascus Document*, and Hellenised Jews would hardly have considered these rules relaxed. Why should they follow these tough rules when they had repented and baptised and guaranteed entry into heaven. All they had to do was to be good.

They saw their repentance and baptism as absolving them from the need to follow the law. Since they had not been following it anyway, it was good for their consciences. Jesus, in cases like that of plucking on the sabbath, was telling his insurgents that they need not follow the law when active service prevented it. Devout Jews had been massacred through refusing to fight on the sabbath, and Jesus did not see that as a sensible use of devotion. He was not, however, saying the law was abrogated as Christians have argued since. Jesus thought that brief suspensions of strict legality were admissible as long as there was a good reason and sincere intentions were held in the heart. In **Mark 7:15**, Jesus says nothing entering a man can defile him, it is what is within him that does that. He is not saying all food is clean, but simply saying that the food taboos can be suspended when it is not possible to follow them for good reason. That is the reason held within—in the heart, not in the belly.

The trouble was that these practical and temporary matters were gladly accepted as permanent by the lawless Hellenised Jews that heard them. The praxis of them was in an actual insurrection, but the converts were persuaded that they were participating in a forty year cosmic battle with the forces of Satan, and, as Christian soldiers they were justified in setting aside the details of the law during the war. By the time the forty years had passed, and the bishops had to find a longer excuse—the millennium—the abrogation of the law had become the norm for Christianised Jews, and the gentile “Godfearers” who had also joined had never known any reason to follow the law. They too will have found it convenient, despite their previous “Jewish” piety, and many will have joined, by then, on the understanding that the law had been abrogated.

The bishops agreed. Their gentile flocks were growing much quicker, they realised, without a need to impose anything as taxing as God's law, so they were happy to accept that the crucified Galilaean had abrogated it. At about this time, Mark wrote his gospel and included Mark 7:19b, in which all food was declared clean. A practical code for men on active service had been invoked as applying to Christian soldiers engaged in the forty years' cosmic battle and after forty years became the norm, justified now by faith being the important quality for a Christian. The faith was now necessary. The end of the forty years of cosmic battle seemed to be realised in the Jewish War of 66-70 AD, but despite the catastrophic war, the hosts of heaven did not arrive, and nor did Jesus. The promise of the Parousia disappeared. Some leader of the Christian Church wrote an epistle, supposed to have been penned much earlier by S Peter, to revive their faith. People this author called scoffers, another popular Essene word, were mocking the Christians who had been expecting the return:

Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

2 Peter 3:4

His excuses were that God had delayed the return to give sinners more time to repent, and time was different for God! A day for Him is like a thousand years, so Christians might have to wait a very long time for the kingdom to come—till kingdom come, in fact! The result was the faithless lapsed or returned to Judaism, and the bishops had to claim that God was just testing the faith of the Christians who remained. The simple Christian had to believe the kingdom would come unexpectedly—so much for the signs and prophecies—and, meanwhile, the bishops sensibly also prepared for a longer period before the same could happen again, and invented the thousand years of the millennium inserted into **Revelation**. Even so, this eventually ran out and became another severe test of Christian faith in the eleventh century—Christians passed the test! Heretics, however were more suspicious.

The belief in the imminent approach of the day of judgment waned during the third century, but was temporarily revived in the years 1000 then 1033, believed to be the end of the millennium. Anticipating

of the day of judgment, Christians everywhere decided further effort in this life was pointless. A thousand years before, Paul had had to contend with the same beliefs. Christians sold their property, aiming to live on the proceeds until the day arrived. Some hoped to ensure a place in the coming kingdom by giving everything they had to the poor, and opting to be “the Poor” themselves when the day came. Others gave all their possessions to the Church. The Church was naturally cynical enough to accept these gifts. The donors brought the end of the world on to themselves, dying in poverty, while the Church found itself with the enowments to build cathedrals.

The outcome of Jewish war allowed the gentile Christians of the empire to take a pro-Roman stance and prove that generally they were not a Jewish sect, and by 100 AD at the latest, the Christians were no longer considered Jewish by the Roman authorities. Not that they had ceased, with the passing of the forty years, to believe in the return of Jesus, soon. They still read their gospels with the mind set of the Essenes—checking out the signs. Nothing has changed today. They are still looking for prophecies to be fulfilled, and so they were then. Every time some catastrophe happened, they looked at the little apocalypse in Mark, and foresaw the end of the Roman empire. Needless to say, patriotic Romans got annoyed.

Titles and Code

The Essenes were in part a secret society. Believing they were fighters of a holy war, they were fond of communicating in code. It is the origin of the healing miracles in the gospels where sickness is the metaphor of degrees of sinfulness and apostasy. Jesus is curing these people, described as lepers, paralytics, blind and deaf, of moral sickness not physical sickness. It is also why Jesus spoke in parables. When apocryphal but unquestionably Christian gospels like the **Gospel of Thomas** are examined, many of the sayings of Jesus seem cryptic, and the gospel begins saying it records the “secret words” of Jesus written down by Judas Thomas, the Twin. The parables of the canonical gospels have been “explained” by the authors. They put explanations of them in the mouth of Jesus, but the explanations seem absurd because they hardly differ from the obvious interpretation of the parable. It is because the parabolic nature of the original has already been mainly opened up, making the explanations virtually redundant. It has not happened in **Thomas**.

Similarly, the Essenes seem to have had coded titles. Thomas is traditionally the twin of Jesus, and in pictures like the **Last Supper**, he is an identical twin, though the birth narratives make no mention of Mary giving birth to twins. Perhaps “the twin” was the coded title of some official position in the hierarchy. That it was a tradition from the outset could have been why a rumour arose that Jesus did not himself die on the cross. “The twin” could have stood in for him, or could have pretended he was Jesus after his death, accounting for the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus. The allegation was made, because even the bible has scenes transparently invented to refute it. Thomas and the resurrected Jesus are conspicuously arranged to be together in the same room, with “doubting” Thomas testing Jesus for veracity. It was to prove that one was not standing in for the other.

New Testament scholar, Helmut Koester, thinks the sayings of **Thomas** pre-date the canonical gospels, and many possibly pre-date the gospel events, being Essene sayings used by a succession of Righteous Teachers before being finally attached to the most famous of them, Jesus. The sayings in **Thomas** often appear in the canonical gospels in essentially the same form, suggesting this might be the missing sayings source, “**Q**”, long supposed by textual analysts of the bible. In 370 AD, the archbishop of Alexandria ordered all Christians in Egypt to destroy the “heretical” books in their possession. The monks of an, even then, ancient monastery took the precaution of burying the heretical books of their library safely in the sand hoping to retrieve them in less illiberal times, but they never came! The books remained hidden for 1600 years until they were discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. **The Gospel of Thomas** was among them.

Thomas also explains what seems to have been another title, Barabbas, Son of the Father. The Barabbas of the gospels was a rebel who had led an insurrection and was being held in jail, and chosen by the perfidious Jews in exchange for the life of the innocent Jesus! Jesus was Barabbas! He it was who always referred to his father in heaven, and Christians are certain he was the Son of God. Since Barabbas, in Aramaic, means “Son of the Father” it is a coincidence of vanishingly small likelihood that a

revolutionary should have been held in jail with a surname that was uniquely applicable to another Jesus, Jesus the Nazarene. For both were also called Jesus! A different sort of twin of Jesus has appeared, a man with the same name! The author of Thomas writes:

When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realise that it is you who are the sons of the living father.

Not only is this manifestly gnostic, it explains that the Essenes were a brotherhood—all initiates were sons of the Father, sons of God! All in this state of self-awareness had the title Barabbas. The word Barabbas appears several times in **Acts of the Apostles** in a bastardized form—Barnabas, Barsabbas—an attempt by the author to hide an embassaing truth. The Essenes thought of themselves as the bridgehead of heaven on earth, and Jesus told the Nazarenes it:

What you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it.

The Gospel of Thomas

They were angels in waiting, just as the old priests of the traditional Persian temple had been. They also gave themselves the titles “The Just” or “The Righteous”. Pagels notes that the **Gospel of Philip** takes the title “Son of the Father” even further. The angelic state of the Essene initiate is not merely a Christian “but a Christ”. This astonishingly blasphemous sounding belief to modern ears is the very belief of the Cathars. So all Essene initiates seem to have been Sons of the Father, or Christs, all were brothers, and one seems to have been designated the twin brother of the leader or Nasi. He has no particular role in the gospels except as a doubter, and a doubter is a kind of adversary, a satan. He challenges an averred truth. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus addresses Peter as Satan, and Judas, in **Luke**, is entered by Satan. The Essenes might have had a ritual role of Satan, and this is being recognized in these passages, but, bearing in mind that Satan and Michael were mythical sons of God, effectively twins though of opposite persuasions, the title of ritual Satan might have really belonged to Thomas. A ninth century ivory book cover in the library of Frankfurt university, depicting the temptation of Christ by the Devil in the wilderness, shows the Devil as Christ’s twin!



Moreover, Seth or Set might be the origin of the Hebrew word “Satan”. Whether the Israelites were believed to have left Egypt with the Hyksos around 1600 BC or in the time of the nineteenth dynasty Pharaohs, the popular Egyptian god in each case was Set. So, the Israelites, assuming they must inevitably been influenced by the prevailing beliefs of the Egyptians before the exodus, will have modelled their God, Yehouah, on Set. However, the exodus myth is unhistorical, so this identification of Yehouah with Set does not arise.

Set is the wicked brother of Osiris in Egyptian myth, but was not always a wicked god. On inscriptions, Set was “a strong god, “the powerful one of Thebes” and “Ruler of the South”, whose anger was to be feared” and whom the Greeks called Typhon. He is a sun god who fires arrows of heat, the god of the desert, of drought and thirst, and of the sterile ocean. Set was identified with all destruction and the receding of the waters of the Nile.

Set is the opposite of his brother, Osiris, who is fertilising moisture, the rising Nile—life. Osiris was thought of as moral goodness, but succumbed in the struggle with evil. Set slayed Osiris, as night overcomes the light of the sun. He was revived as a god but, through his experience, took charge of dead kings, but appeared also to the living as his son Hor, who forces Set to submit and to make the old serpent, Apophis, surrender its spoil. So the sun sets then rise again, just as men die but are reborn. In Christianity, Set became Satan, and Hor became Jesus. Set was inimical to life, and had been castrated by Hor, just as Jesus was supposed to have rendered Satan impotent, but still thrashing about unbound:

The power of Typhon, although dimmed and crushed, is still in its last agonies and

convulsions.

Plutarch, On Isis and Osiris

Set was the sun god of the summer heat, whereas Hor, the son of Osiris—Osiris reborn—was the god of the winter sun and the inundation. Hor had lost an eye to Set—the hot summer sun had been put out, leaving Hor only with the fertilising winter sun. Plutarch identifies Typhon with relentless heat of the sun, and Osiris with the moon. Osiris is associated with the night, the moon and the night time sun, perilously travelling in the realm of the serpent, Apophis, back to the dawn. Set was associated with the serpent, Apophis, which threatened to swallow up the sun each night. Set is a storm god, and storms swallowed up the sun. Storms were not necessary for fertility in Egypt as they were in the Levant, but an identification of Seth with Baal Hadad might have motivated the Asiatic conquerors called the Hyksos to worship him. Even so, he remained a popular Egyptian god until the twenty second dynasty or later when he became associated with wickedness. Plutarch wrote:

The Egyptians occasionally humiliate and insult him at certain festivals. They nevertheless propitiate and soothe him by means of certain sacrifices.

The Egyptians are said to have sacrificed a donkey to him by driving it over a cliff. It sounds similar to the ritual of the scapegoat. In some stories the donkey were ridden by a red-headed man. Seth was red, and the donkey was his beast. Jesus is popularly red-headed and red-bearded, and rode a donkey, sounding like a manifestation of Seth, or his twin, the divine king. Seth worship was associated with the annual death of a divine king! It draws to mind the famous graffito of the Palatine barracks dated to 240 AD of a crucified donkey inscribed, "Alexamenos worships his god". It is easy to see the suspicions of the gnostics that the Christians had been fooled by Satan into falsely worshipping him.

Thomas has this strong warning against lying:

Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate—for these things are manifest in the sight of heaven.

With the suppression of the Gospel of Thomas, Christianity conveniently got rid of its most explicit command not to lie or do hateful things. Having got rid of it, the churches could get as corrupt as they liked as long as the corruption could be justified in some theocratic sense. They finished up burning people with no fear of God's vengeance. Liars for God were not liars at all, and burning human beings was what God wanted, however hateful it might seem.

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Published on 25 March 1997.

Was Jesus an Essene? Christians deny it. There are some similarities, they say, but too many differences. This book shows Jesus was indeed an Essene, and one of their leaders, and explains why

there were differences from the Essenes described by Josephus, the Roman historian.

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What did Jesus consider to be God's when he, according to Christians, agreed to pay the tribute money, saying, "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's? Aren't the only characteristic possessions claimed by God, His Children and the land he promised them? Jesus was refusing to pay tribute when he uttered this famous sentence.

What was the unbindable, savage demon that Jesus rendered impotent when it revealed itself to be really 2000 Gadarene swine and to have the name Legion? Is Gadarene, an inland town the correct name for these swine? What was the Field of Akeldama where guts were spilled, gentiles were supposed to have lain asleep and had the nickname the field of blood? Who were the Galileans whose blood was spilt in the temple? Why did Jesus curse an innocent fig tree? Could it have had anything to do with the fig tree being a symbol of Rome?

Why have these questions not been adequately answered? Forget the obfuscations of the Jesus Seminar. All these and many more questions are convincingly and controversially answered in "The Hidden Jesus" which can be ordered from good booksellers and libraries and is available by mail order at £14.49 inc p&p (UK) or \$30 inc shipping and dollar conversion(US)..

In this remarkable book Dr Michael D Magee peels off the pious accretions and interpretative wrappings added by the earliest gentile bishops to the story of the exploits of Jesus to make the gospels acceptable to the Romans and the basis of a universal religion. The truth is peculiarly transparent in the bible, although two thousand years of conditioning and the invention of spurious translations of Greek words to suit Christian belief in the so-called New Testament Greek have succeeded in blinding even the most critical of scholars.

The gentile bishops of the embryonic religion were faced with travelers' tales from Palestine that Jesus was not what he seemed. This oral tradition was strong because Jews were already widespread in the Empire and after the defeat of their rebellion in the Jewish War and their dispersion in 70 AD many more arrived from Palestine. Pericopes, individual stories about Jesus, kept coming to the bishops and when they did not match their preferred image of a saintly Son of God, had to be "corrected". The bishops had to say to their flocks, "Ho, Ho, Theophilus, how silly you are. It was not quite like that. No, this is what really happened." Then they would change a few subjects and objects and retell the tale such that a core remained but the sense favoured the view they were propagating rather than the truth.

It still happens today. There never was a gate in Jerusalem called The Eye of a Needle but it was

invented by clerics to allow the rich to be saved when the plain sense of Jesus's aside was that it was impossible for the rich to be saved. Dr Magee explains parables and the healing miracles, and such difficulties as the cursing of the fig tree, the meaning of Nazarene, the cleansing of the temple, the release of Barabbas, Peter's triple denial, the tribute money and the Gadarene swine.

This book is a tour de force. For honest reasoning people, though not those who are irrational or emotionally dependent on the traditional image of Jesus, gospel stories will never be the same again-they now make sense. Oddly, the message of many modern Christians is upheld-that God is not an external supernatural entity ready to interfere with the world at a whim or a prayer. Jesus believed an external God was ready to intervene-he was forsaken or rather mistaken-but Christians have made the same mistake ever since, teaching people to blame devils instead of facing up to their own responsibility for their actions. Our gods and devils are within us and there we must seek and come to terms with them.

This sampler is taken from the website:

<http://www.askwhy.co.uk/>