

JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

by

DAVID MISHKIN

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University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof Ernest van Eck

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJOT	A Journal of Theology
AJS	Journal of the Association of Jewish Studies
AJT	American Journal of Theology
ATR	Anglican Theological Review
BAR	Biblical Archeology Review
BHR	Bulletin of Historical Research
BI	Biblical Interpretation
Bib Sac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BW	The Biblical World
CBC	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CBR	Currents in Biblical Research
CCAR	The Reform Jewish Quarterly
CJ	Conservative Judaism Journal
CTM	Currents in Theology and Mission
CT	Christianity Today
CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
CTR	Criswell Theological Review
Forward	The Jewish Daily Forward
HCUA	Hebrew Union College Annual
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
IBMR	International Bulletin of Missionary Research
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
EJ	Encyclopedia Judaica
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAJH	Journal of American Jewish History
JANT	Jewish Annotated New Testament
JAOS	Journal of American Oriental Society
JBQ	Jewish Biblical Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBR	Journal of Bible and Religion
JES	Journal of Ecumenical Studies
JHC	Journal of Higher Criticism
JHI	Journal of the History of Ideas
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JJPHRP	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period
JJTP	Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy

JOR	Journal of Religion
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRB	Jewish Review of Books
JRJ	Journal of Reform Judaism
JSHJ	Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSS	Jewish Social Studies
JSP	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
MJ	Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience
MJS	Journal of Modern Jewish Studies
MT	Modern Theology
NTS	New Testament Studies
JETS	Journal of Evangelical Theological Society
PCJCL	Proceedings of the Center for Jewish Christian Learning
PTR	Princeton Theological Review
RBL	Review of Biblical Literature
R&E	Review and Expositor
RJ	Reform Judaism Magazine
RRJ	Review of Rabbinic Judaism
RSR	Religious Studies Review
Shofar	Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies
Sh'ma	Sh'ma, A Journal of Jewish Ideas
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TB	Tyndale Bulletin
TJ	Trinity Journal
Tradition	Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought
USQR	Union Seminary Quarterly Review
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Jewish study of Jesus has been an evolving venture. Many aspects of the New Testament and the life of Jesus have been analyzed and discussed. But, there is one issue that has remained strangely untouched in the conversation. Ironically, it is the very event that the New Testament proclaims is the most important of all, his resurrection from the dead. Paul could not have put the matter more clearly: '*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins*' (1 Cor 15:17; emphasis added). This study will explore various aspects of the Jewish response to the resurrection of Jesus.

1.1 THE RESURRECTION AND THE JEWISH STUDY OF JESUS

Jewish interaction with the New Testament has its roots in the *Haskalah* of the late eighteenth hundreds (see Chapter 2). A century ago it was still all but taboo to speak of such things, but a few pioneers attempted to break new ground after a prolonged silence. Even small admissions that fell short of Christological claims were costly. As Claude Montefiore wrote: '[F]or many centuries to say that Jesus was a good man and a fine teacher, but not divine, was exceedingly dangerous' (Montefiore 1909:xviii). These scholars often proceeded with trepidation. Christian would not like a less than orthodox portrayal of their Savior, although with the advancement of critical scholarship this would become less of a problem. The Jewish community's reaction would also cast aspersions on such studies, as noted by Hyman Enelow.

Consideration of Jesus on the part of a Jew is regarded as a sign of weakness, if not disloyalty, as a leaning in the wrong direction, particularly if it shows symptoms of admiration for Jesus.

(Enelow 1920:1)

The trickle in such scholarship at the beginning of the century became a deluge by the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Today, there are many Jewish scholars in the field of New Testament and related studies. They are not just Jews who happen to be studying the New Testament. A growing number are highly trained New Testament scholars who are adding fresh insights to the field. A number of social conditions, particularly in the United States of America, have yielded this new wave. Shaul Maggid explains.

Liberal Protestantism is no longer dominant, Jewish success, and acceptance, in America is more well-founded, the Holocaust created a new paradigm for Jewish identity and existence (as well as sympathy for Jews and Judaism more generally), Jewish theology

has extended beyond acculturation and into the more creative, and precarious, realm of adaptation and experimentation, and Jewish tradition is less unstable due in part to the rise of Orthodoxy and Hasidic spirituality, in part refracted through postmodern and New Age lenses.

(Maggid 2011:375)

The interest in Jesus has advanced much more slowly among non-scholars. In 1956, Samuel Sandmel observed that most American Jews were quite ignorant of the New Testament. Their understanding usually came from ‘oblique and random contacts’ that may include a chapter from a literature course, or a portion from a Christian wedding or funeral (Sandmel 1956:xi). Over fifty years later, according to Alan Segal, the situation remained the same. ‘On the whole’ he wrote, ‘most Christians would be surprised to learn that ordinary Jews have not read any of the New Testament’ (Segal 2007:322). But, the scholarly wave would have its effect on ‘ordinary Jews’ as well. By the end of the first decade of the twenty first century, several important works encouraging Jews to read the New Testament appeared.

The first was by Rabbi Michael J. Cook, in his book *Modern Jews engage the New Testament*. He recognized that most Jews do not know enough about the New Testament to adequately respond to questions about Jesus. This, he writes, is the exact opposite way that Jews normally approach a problem. Usually, they choose to ‘amass – not shun – knowledge’ (Cook 2008:xiii). But, because of Jewish aversion to reading the New Testament, they feel bad about rejecting it in ignorance. This book seeks to help, and this is apparently the meaning behind the book’s subtitle *Enhancing Jewish well-being in a Christian environment*.

The focus of his book is ‘not for readers to learn the New Testament’s *content*’. Rather, it is to help them ‘discern the *dynamics* – the problem solving techniques – that underlie the content’ (Cook 2008:xiii). By this, he means learning to understand the reasons why each author chose to write what he did. Cook teaches New Testament at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and is therefore helping to influence a whole new generation of Jewish New Testament scholars. For this reason, and because he has commentated on many of the relevant topics, he will be important for this study.

In 2011, the *Jewish Annotated New Testament (JANT)* was published. This is a milestone in Jewish-Christian relations, and specifically the Jewish study of Jesus. It is neither a missionary nor an anti-missionary tract. It offers commentary by fifty Jewish scholars, some of whom are leading experts in their specific fields pertaining to history, Judaism and New Testament studies. Unlike Cook’s treatise, the goal of this project (to which Cook also contributes) was to expose Jewish readers to the content of the book that has overwhelmingly influenced Western culture (Brettler & Levine 2012, Neff &

Levine 2012, Levine & Brettler 2012). Its main goal is for Jewish readers to learn about Jesus and the New Testament itself from an academic but user-friendly standpoint.

Orthodox rabbi and author, Shmueli Boteach, also weighed in on the subject. His book, *Kosher Jesus*, provides a mix of classic polemical arguments with a modern pluralistic tone. Major points of Christology are clearly denounced as false, yet Boteach believes these are perfectly fine for Christians to believe. He does not specifically encourage his Jewish audience to read the New Testament. But, he argues, Jews may accept Jesus the Jew as long as the 'patina of paganism and the supernatural' are removed from the picture (Boteach 2012:viii). His main contribution lies in bringing a Jewish-friendly understanding of Jesus to such a large audience. Boteach was already a best-selling author with a wide fan base. By sheer volume, this book will likely influence more Jewish people than the *JANT*.

Today, there is a radically new open door for the Jewish study of Jesus among both scholars and laymen alike. The contemporary quest is dramatically different than the days of Montefiore, Enelow and others from a century ago. The idea that it may be awkward, or even dangerous, to talk about Jesus seems archaic. Whatever else one believes about him, he was a Jew. To say anything else would be absurd. Yet, exactly how much Jewish scholars are able to affirm about the Jewish life and message of Jesus remains to be seen.

It is one thing to study the life of Jesus – however much one believes can be reconstructed – and compare his words and deeds to other Jewish teachers of his day. This keeps the discussion in the realm of history. The issue of the resurrection, however, brings unique challenges. It is a historical event that, if it really happened, has profound theological and personal implications. As Geza Vermes wrote: 'Unlike the crucifixion, it is an unparalleled phenomenon in history. Two types of extreme reaction are possible: faith or disbelief' (Vermes 2008:2).

One of the assumptions of much critical scholarship is that there is a vast difference between the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith'. Because of this, the resurrection often falls outside the discussion of historicity. It is seen solely as a matter for adherents of the faith, irrelevant for the historian. But, this is not entirely correct. The resurrection of Jesus is part of a narrative made up of several events, at least some of which are acknowledged by even the most skeptical scholars. If the resurrection is removed from the scenario, an explanation is needed as to why subsequent historical events (among other things, the immediate belief that there was a resurrection) occurred. Perhaps these can be accounted for easily, but an explanation is nonetheless needed.

The resurrection must be studied in its own right as part of the life of the historical Jesus. This raises the question of how historiography can even approach such a question. For many, it is a *non-sequitor*, as Alan F. Segal has stated:

I am suggesting that trying to prove the resurrection historically is the same as trying to prove the Trinity historically or trying to prove Adam and Eve scientifically – a category mistake.

(Segal 2006:137)

Segal is perhaps half-right. Historians cannot provide the same level of proof as, for example, a chemist examining DNA evidence. But, history can and does testify to causes and effects based on historical data. Segal's own response to the resurrection is documented below. While he has a minimalist view of which events in the Gospels are historical, there are a few events that he is unable to dismiss. These very things point toward the resurrection. In response, he offers highly nuanced explanations. Whether or not he has succeeded in providing a plausible alternative can be debated. But, in the process, he himself has demonstrated the value of historiography for this discussion.

Many scholars simply dismiss the question of the resurrection as a foregone conclusion. It is easier to remain at a distance and say, for example, 'anything could have happened' or 'we just can't know'. But, the scholars who have taken the time to draw closer and examine the issues have found it much more difficult to explain away. There are two Jewish scholars who have written entire books on the resurrection of Jesus, and they are by far the most positive about the historicity of the event.

Pinchas Lapide concluded that the resurrection actually happened, but that Jesus was not the Messiah for Jews. Geza Vermes affirmed virtually all of the events surrounding the resurrection, and also that the standard counter arguments do not hold up. However, he remained non-committal regarding his own personal belief. These authors have demonstrated that a thorough historical investigation from a specifically Jewish point of view is not only possible, but may result in some surprising conclusions.

1.2 THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AS A BOUNDARY MARKER

The first people to believe that Jesus rose from the dead were, of course, Jews. Gentiles also came to believe and soon became the dominant group. A visible remnant of Jews continued to believe for at least three centuries, up until the time of Constantine. There is also evidence for Jewish believers in Jesus in the fifth century (Pritz 1992; Skarsaune 2007). The term 'parting of the ways' has often been used (see Dunn 1999) to explain the process whereby Judaism and Christianity developed. Other scholars, however, prefer to see it as more of a 'partitioning' of the ways since the early

centuries where much more fluid regarding both cultural and theological boundaries (Becker & Reed 2003).

At a certain point in time, permanent boundaries became entrenched. For one thing, Christians – a label that by then became synonymous with Gentiles – believed that Jesus rose from the dead, something Jews no longer believed. The Gentile branch of the Jesus-believing community became divorced from its Jewish roots at an early stage. Christianity came to mean something completely non-Jewish, and specifically something hostile. The charge of *deicide* put the blame for Jesus' death, exclusively, on the Jewish people. The horrific history of 'Christian' persecution of the Jews has been well documented (Cohen 2007; Flannery 1965; Rupp 1972; Almog 1988; Cohn-Sherbok 1997; Carroll 2001). This history is familiar to all Jews, but unfortunately all but unknown to most Christians. Jewish scholars have therefore paid much more attention to Jesus' trial and crucifixion than his resurrection (see Hirsch 1892; Hunterberg 1920; Zeitlin 1942; Goldin 1948; Horbury 1970; Cohen 1971; Catchpole 1971). Because the death of Jesus has been used to cause such bad news for the Jewish people throughout history, anything else about his life has been a moot point. Only recently has this begun to change.

By the time the ways had fully parted – or had become partitioned – there were, quite literally, two mutually exclusive groups. The Church forgot its Jewish roots with disastrous results. The synagogue was forced to define itself, along with key theological points, in response to the situation. This was an important factor in the evolution of Judaism. Many of the most important Christian beliefs were not only considered wrong or foreign, they became completely antithetical, nothing less than an affront to the very foundations of Judaism (Schafer 2014).

In recent years, some of these traditional boundary markers have been challenged from within the world of mainstream Judaism. Israel Yuval of Hebrew University has written extensively on this. His book, *Two nations in your womb*, sought to demonstrate that

(T)he polemics between Judaism and Christianity during the first centuries of the Common Era, in all their varieties and nuances, played a substantial role in the mutual formation of the two religions. Here I am referring not only to explicit and declared polemic, but a broad panorama of expressions that include, particularly from the Jewish side, allusions, ambiguities, denials, refutations, and at times also internalization and quiet agreement.

(Yuval 2006:xvii)

Daniel Boyarin has written on this theme as well. As an example, he cites the concept of the *logos* – the Jewish doctrine that between God and the world there is 'a second

divine entity, God's Word (Logos) or God's Wisdom, who mediates between fully transcendent Godhead and the material world' (Boyarin 2004:30-31). It was not the Gospel of John's use of this concept that was problematic. Boyarin traces the history of this theology, from its broad use in Philo to its original polemical use by Justin Martyr, as an example of how the partitioning took shape.

This doctrine was widely held by Jews in the pre-Christian era and after the beginnings of Christianity was widely held and widely contested in Christian circles. By the fourth century, Jews who held such a doctrine and Christians who rejected it were defined as "neither Jews nor Christians" but heretics.

(Boyarin 2004:31)

The rigid theological boundaries that developed, combined with the long history of persecution, has made Jesus a definite outsider in the world of Judaism, and Jews who say otherwise have clearly stepped over the line. This is seen today in the typical response to the modern Messianic Jewish movement. This is especially relevant to this study, since the author of this thesis is a Messianic Jew. I am using this term in the broad sense, meaning a Jewish person who believes that Jesus is the Messiah as expressed in the New Testament. For many, even the existence of such a category is a violation of the most basic Jewish boundaries. Steven Leonard Jacobs is a Reform Rabbi and professor, who recently wrote the following.

That is to say, truthfully, there is only *one* Jewish theological affirmation that unites *all* streams of religious Judaism, namely, that Jesus is *not* the Messiah for the Jewish people, regardless of how he is perceived, understood, and affirmed by others. Thus, at the moment at which a Jewish person *chooses* to embrace/welcome/accept this Christ, that person – born of Jewish parents, inheritor of both the Jewish religious and historical traditions – is no longer a Jew but a Christian and must be understood as such, even while acknowledging with sadness the failure of that which I hold most sacred to meet that person's religious and spiritual needs.

(Jacobs 2012:513, emphasis in the original)

Several observations may be made here. First, it is ironic that such words come from a representative of liberal Judaism, given the way Orthodox Jews have often viewed the Reform movement (see Yuter 1989; Ferziger 2009). Second, the fact that rejecting Jesus is 'the only' thing that unites all religious Jews is a remarkable statement and perhaps worthy of a study in itself. Third, the relationship between identity and belief needs to be examined further. Messianic Jews were born Jews and do not wish to be anything else (see Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Harvey 2009). They write powerfully against the historic anti-Semitism done in the name of Christianity (Brown 1992; Fischer 2004), and they strongly proclaim the dangers and incorrectness of the Church's supercessionism from a number of perspectives (Fruchtenbaum 1994; Rudolph 2011). Yet, Messianic Jews are often seen only as those who have joined the enemy.

Some rabbis and Jewish scholars have been more conciliatory. At the turn of this century there were four books by Jewish scholars that wrote about Messianic Jews with uncommon objectivity (Feher 1998; Harris-Shapiro 1999; Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Ariel 2000). Since then, there have been small events that featured Messianic and traditional Jewish scholars in dialogue (see Rosner 2013:152-3). The subject of Messianic Jews was also an issue at the Hebrew University forum in 2013 where two Messianic Jews participated in the discussion. Later that same year, a major US poll of American Jews revealed that thirty-four percent said it is possible for Jews to believe in Jesus (Goodstein 2013).

All of this has implications for the topic at hand. The resurrection of Jesus is potentially the gateway to faith, a faith that many would equate with a denial of their core identity. The initial Jewish response to the resurrection may therefore range from apathy to disdain. But, Jewish scholars – as scholars – need to approach the subject as objectively as possible, in the same way that Christian scholars of Islam need to examine the Koran and the life of Mohammed. In fact, areas of dispute should be studied that much more thoroughly. The initial question about the resurrection – *did it happen?* – need not be hindered by boundaries or polemics. It is a historical question.

Eugene Borowitz understood this. His book, *Contemporary Christologies*, examines beliefs about Jesus by a number of leading Christian thinkers. Some of these beliefs were esoteric and would only make sense if the New Testament is assumed to be true from the start. Wolfhart Pannenberg, by contrast, focused on the resurrection as a starting point and as an event that can be approached objectively. Borowitz appreciated this, as it places the study of Jesus on an academic rather than polemical playing field.

There is no distinctive Jewish response to Pannenberg's argument. There does not need to be, for the question raised is a neutral one: does the evidence Pannenberg presented justify the historical conclusion he reached?

(Borowitz 1980:37)

The issue here is not specifically Pannenberg's arguments, but the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event that may be studied. The search for the event itself must be undertaken before confronting the implications. Admittedly, this may be easier said than done for both those who already believe in the resurrection and those who do not.

1.3 THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN JEWISH HISTORY

According to the New Testament and early Church history, the resurrection played the dominant role in belief and proclamation for the new movement. It is not clear how much this was a decisive issue for those Jews who did not believe in Jesus. Was it a major stumbling block, or one of a number of things that were unacceptable? As Claudia

Setzer has observed, virtually all of the writings about Jewish responses to the movement were documented either by pagans or followers of Jesus. But, some things may be deduced. Given that the resurrection was 'incomprehensible' to most Jews, she writes, 'fireworks over this issue are virtually inevitable' (Setzer 1991:322). In a later work she summarized the earliest documentation, beginning with Justin Martyr.

He says Jews deny Jesus' resurrection, repeating a charge from the Gospel of Matthew (28.13-15) and the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* (8.29-31) that Jews claim Jesus' tomb was empty because his disciples stole the body, not because he rose from the dead.

(Setzer 2012:577)

How much can be gleaned from these and other non-Jewish sources about the Jewish opinion is a matter of speculation (Baumgarten 1990). Our interest here, however, concerns the specifically (non-Christian) Jewish voices that have commented on the resurrection. In one sense, Judaism has no official position on the resurrection of Jesus, as does Islam. The Koran specifically states that Jesus neither died on the cross nor was he resurrected. There is, however, one text in the Talmud that might be the earliest reference of a specifically Jewish view of the resurrection of Jesus. Because of censorship over the centuries, the references to Jesus in the Talmud were deleted or disguised. Exactly which ones were originally referring to him is not always clear. But, there are a few passages in the Talmud that are commonly accepted as clearly referring to Jesus.

One such passage appears in tractate *Gittin*. At the end of *Gittin* 56b, there is mention of Onkelos who wishes to convert to Judaism. In order to understand Judaism and the fate of those who speak or act against it, Onkelos raises several people from the dead and asks them questions. First, he raises Titus by 'magic arts'. Then, at the beginning of *Gittin* 57a, he raises Balaam 'by incantation'. He then raises 'the sinners of Israel', also by incantation (Simon 1936:260-261). This term ('the sinners of Israel') is almost universally understood to have been a reference to Jesus before being changed as a result of censorship (Visotzky 2012:580). In a roundabout way, it is very likely a response to the Christian claim that he had been raised from the dead. Rather than deny the event outright, the meaning assigned to it creates a polemic. Jesus was indeed raised, this verse states, but by evil forces and most certainly not by God.

There is one other interesting source that touches on the resurrection of Jesus. The *Toledot Yeshu* is a counter version of the story of Jesus and fragments of it appear in various forms throughout Jewish history. Perhaps the only point of scholarly agreement is on how mysterious the document is regarding its authorship, dating and original purpose. The oldest extant copy is an Aramaic source from the tenth century, and some

have argued that it stems from perhaps the third or fourth century (Schafer *et al.* 2011:3).

The view of the resurrection found in the *Toledot Yeshu* might very well have been inspired by a Christian source. The Church Father, Tertullian, wrote of counter theories to the resurrection made by skeptics in his day (late second, early third century). One was simply that the disciples stole the body. Another, more original offering, is that a gardener stole the body because he did not want his lettuce field being trampled on by the tomb's visitors. According to Yaacov Deutsch, it 'is likely that these traditions are related to later versions of *Toledot Yeshu* that mention similar details' (Schafer *et al.* 2011:286).

Throughout the Middle Ages the basic story of the life of Jesus was known among Jews, from both the canonical form and the *Toledot Yeshu* (Berger 1998). The polemical debate did not directly address the resurrection. This was the conclusion of Catholic scholar, Steven J. McMichael in a 2009 article. The main Jewish scholars of the period wrote about resurrection in general ways. This included discussions about redemption and eschatology. Regarding Maimonides, he wrote:

He does not engage in polemic against Christianity. Because of his position on the age of the Messiah and on the role of the body in the resurrection process, we can assume that Maimonides never had to deal with the resurrection of Jesus. If the body has no existence in the World to Come, there is no relevance to the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

(McMichael 2009:13)

Maimonides' views on resurrection were unique and controversial. Other Medieval Jewish scholars had different thoughts on the subject, ideas that might not in themselves have excluded the resurrection of Jesus. But, in this area of polemics, a different tactic emerged. The key issues were the Trinity, the law and the messiahship of Jesus. The resurrection would be evaluated in light of these. McMichael continues,

But, they believed that once the former doctrines were disproved, especially the non-Messiahship of Jesus, the latter doctrines (such as the resurrection of Jesus) would become in a way non-issues.

(McMichael 2009:17)

The first Jewish scholar to specifically discuss the resurrection after the Middle Ages was Baruch Spinoza, in the seventeenth century. He was already excommunicated from the synagogue, so he did not approach the subject as a member of the Jewish community. He began with a completely different set of assumptions. Specifically, he categorically denied the possibility of miracles. He did, however, interact with the

historical Jesus to a limited extent. It is a reconstruction, as will be seen below, heavily engendered by his presuppositions.

Higher criticism and a new skepticism in general emerged in the late eighteenth century. But, with it, came a new opportunity for Jews to engage in the study of the New Testament as an objective historical discipline. Moses Mendelsohn was the first Jew in modernity to have the option to discuss Jesus in a new way, although it was still an awkward endeavor. He had a positive view of Jesus, a prelude to the modern movement of reclamation. But, the very Enlightenment that produced the new environment that made such study possible also provided a new paradigm that was quick to dismiss the supernatural.

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of two trends regarding Jews and Jesus. One was the freedom to study the New Testament in various universities. This had previously been forbidden. The roots of the contemporary study begin here. The other trend appeared mostly in London, and to a lesser extent other cities in Europe as well. A new group, called Hebrew Christians, appeared. These were Jews who came to believe in Jesus as Messiah, and yet maintained their Jewish identity (Darby 2010). This had not happened for over a millennium.

One notable Hebrew Christian was Oxford professor, Alfred Edersheim. His book, *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah* was originally published in 1883, and it prefigured the trend to place Jesus in his Jewish context by a full century. He also wrote it in response to the highly critical theories of David Friedrich Strauss, Renan and others who suggested rationalistic alternatives to the New Testament's claims. This was especially true of the resurrection. Edersheim evaluated their responses to the resurrection, and concluded the following.

The theories of deception, delusion, and vision being thus impossible, and the *a priori* objection to the fact as involving a Miracle, being a *petition principia*, the historical student is shut up to the simple acceptance of the narrative.

(Edersheim 1993:906)

Here is an interesting twist. The 'Christian' scholars did not believe in the resurrection and this Jewish scholar did. This was an era of change, and opportunity. Along with the Hebrew Christians who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, Jewish scholars in general began to seriously study Christianity in a new way. Gentile scholars were beginning the quest for the historical Jesus, as Jewish scholars were first approaching Christianity in a new light. Questions of boundaries, sociology and theology dominated the Jewish discussion. The specific question of the resurrection was not immediately at the forefront. It would begin to emerge by the early part of the twentieth century. This

dissertation will focus on the Jewish study of the resurrection from 1900 to the present. Two exceptions from the nineteenth century will also be included (see § 3.1.1 and § 4.3.1).

1.4 GOAL AND PARAMETERS OF THIS STUDY

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature on the Jewish study of Jesus. It will defend the following thesis:

Jewish New Testament scholars too often prematurely dismiss a discussion of the resurrection, leading to an incomplete study of the historical Jesus.

Based on this, this study will address three questions:

1. What are the potential reasons why Jewish New Testament scholars might dismiss a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus (Chapter 3)?
2. What historical alternatives have been proposed (Chapter 4)?
3. How viable are these alternative suggestions (Chapter 5)?

For a start, it needs to be determined that Jewish scholars of the New Testament have, in fact, often prematurely dismissed the resurrection. It might be argued that the field is still relatively new and small, and this accounts for the dearth of scholarship. Also, not all New Testament scholars deal with the historical Jesus. Some are concerned with background information or purely textual issues. This too would account for the limited scholarship on this particular question. However, the resurrection is often sidestepped even within discussions that should otherwise include this topic. This will be documented in three ways.

First, it will be evident in the literature review in Chapter 2. A number of books and articles have documented the Jewish study of Jesus from various perspectives. There has not been a survey of Jewish views of the resurrection. This is because Jewish scholars have not, for the most part, interacted with this issue. The only article on Jewish views of the resurrection of Jesus is my own (Mishkin 2011; cf. Mishkin 1996).

Second, this trend will be documented in the works of scholars who have written about Jesus. Shmueli Boteach's book focuses on the life of Jesus and the life and teachings of Paul. Some events, such as the virgin birth and the Sanhedrin trial, are discussed and deemed unhistorical. There is no section on the resurrection. Chapters on miracles and healing – including a section on Jesus raising others to life – are also void of any comments about the resurrection of Jesus. The only hint of the event in the entire book comes in a discussion of theology, specifically the divinity of Jesus. After three days in a tomb, he writes, Jesus 'ascended to heaven to take his place as the second part of the

Christian godhead' (Boteach 2012:153). His avoidance of the resurrection of Jesus, whether planned or otherwise, is staggering. True, Boteach's book is written on a popular level, but a similar pattern will be seen in the more scholarly contributions below (section § 4:1).

Third, the lack of interest is also revealed in direct statements. A number of writers reviewed Lapidé's book (see the Bibliography), and more than a few commented on the novelty of an Orthodox Jewish scholar who affirms the historicity of the resurrection. But, one reviewer noticed something else. Not only were Lapidé's conclusions unique, the very fact that he addressed the question at all was exceptional. J.P. Galvin wrote the following:

The resurrection of Jesus occupies a central place in contemporary theological discussion. It does not, however, figure prominently in Jewish treatments of Jesus, even in those works which assess Jesus positively as an important part of the history of Judaism.

(Galvin 1980:277)

Schalom Ben-Chorin wrote an important article about Jesus within Judaism. It ends with a list of items that are discussed in most Jewish studies of Jesus. These include the baptism by John, parables, healings, prayer, his Jewish identity, use of the term 'Son of Man', and finally the passion. He then explains,

The resurrection myth, the appearances of the resurrected in Emmaus, Galilee, and Jerusalem, as well as the ascension, are eliminated from the Jewish image of Jesus. The Jewish Jesus-image thus recognizes neither Christmas with the crib and the star of Bethlehem nor Easter with the open grave and the resurrection. The Jewish Jesus-image is the human, all too human, portrayal of a tragic genius, of a deeply Jewish human being.

(Ben-Chorin 1974:430)

The resurrection is not only eliminated from the final Jewish image of Jesus, it is usually summarily dismissed before there is any serious discussion. Given the New Testament's claim to the importance of this issue, and the fact that there has been an ongoing scholarly debate (Ryder 1909; Salvoni 1961; Habermas 2005), the general lack of Jewish discussion is, if nothing else, noteworthy. Jewish study of the New Testament has come a long way since Montefiore a century ago. But, until this central claim becomes a vibrant part of the discussion, it remains incomplete.

In addition to demonstrating this tendency, this study will attempt to show that Jewish scholars who *have* commented on the resurrection have not succeeded in providing an alternative explanation for what really happened. Chapter 4 will reveal the arguments or

comments used to negate the historicity of the event. Chapter 5 will summarize and synthesize these findings in order to create a composite sketch of Jewish scholarship on this issue, and also provide a brief response. It is not the goal of this study to prove that the resurrection happened. Rather, it is to encourage further study.

Chapter 2

Previous studies

This Chapter will survey the major books and articles that have documented the Jewish study of Jesus and New Testament themes. It is divided into four parts. The first Section includes authors who wrote about the general phenomenon of the Jewish study of Jesus. The second will focus on surveys of views of Jesus coming from specific Jewish subgroups (namely, Israelis, artists and Zionists). The third Section looks at Jewish views of two specific subjects, including the trial of Jesus and the apostle Paul. The final category will review both anthologies and studies of specific individual scholars in this field. Some of the earlier works listed here are also mentioned in a summary of such literature in Donald Hagner's book, *The Jewish reclamation of Jesus* (Hagner 1984:305-311).

The purpose of this Chapter is, first of all, to provide the background and historical context of the modern Jewish study of Jesus. The dates, causes and trends that produced the modern phenomenon will not need to be repeated when discussing individuals later in this study. The second purpose is to demonstrate that the resurrection of Jesus was not an issue that warranted specific investigation. Views on this topic have not been part of the discussion because it has not been an area of Jewish interest.

2.1 GENERAL STUDIES

2.1.1 Clyde W. Votaw

The first article to document the Jewish study of Jesus appeared in *The Biblical World* in 1905. Clyde W. Votaw writes as a Christian who was encouraged by the new scholarly interest in Jesus within Reform Judaism. He was challenged to write this article because of the words of Claude Montefiore, who had recently said that, 'Christian scholars are wholly neglectful of the new and transforming light which modern Jewish scholarship has thrown upon the history of Judaism in Jesus' day' (Votaw 1905:112). Votaw begins by explaining the Reform movement and its embrace of modernity.

The article focuses on the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which was published just four years earlier and was a monumental work of Jewish scholarship. It became the authoritative standard in the twentieth century, at least among non-orthodox Jews. It is also noteworthy for the attention it gave to Jesus and other Christian themes. The Section on Jesus is subdivided into three parts: 'Jesus in history,' 'Jesus in theology' and 'Jesus in Jewish Legend,' written by Joseph Jacobs, Kaufman Kohler and Samuel Krauss respectively. Votaw believed that 'an honest, candid effort has been made to judge

Christianity fairly and to appraise it correctly'. He is also aware that both Jews and Christians have 'inveterate prejudices to overcome' regarding their respective views of the New Testament, principally concerning its Jewish themes (Votaw 1905:104).

The Jewish perspective represented in the *Encyclopedia*, Votaw writes, will be found to agree with 'the most radical positions of present-day Christian scholars, like Pfeleiderer, Schmiedel, and O. Hotzman'. The gospels are said to be based on facts, but the earliest forms of the narrative of Jesus have been 'misunderstood, modified and elaborated during fifty or more years of transmission and translation' (Votaw 1905:105). These include the infancy stories, the baptism, the temptation, the transfiguration, and the resurrection (Votaw 1905:106). Jesus was an Essene and he did perform healings. However, 'all originality in the content and point of view is denied to Jesus' (Votaw 1905:108). As for his death, it was confined to 'a small number of priests' and 'the Jewish nation was not responsible' (Votaw 1905:111). Jesus was a good Jew who observed the law, while 'Christianity' was the invention of Paul. Votaw sees irony in the fact that the Reform movement chose to distance itself from a movement wherein the Law is radically reinterpreted.

The position of the modern Jewish scholar seems peculiar. They have themselves arrived at just this freedom from their ancestral Law which Christians suppose Jesus taught. As may be seen above in the platform of Reform Judaism, they do not regard the statutes of the Law as binding upon themselves further than they approve for their own lives. They, too, assume a position of superiority to their Law, judging what parts of it they should observe and which parts they need not observe.

(Votaw 1905:114)

Votaw then spends some time responding to the *Encyclopedia's* critical comments. But, overall, he sees the new interest in Jesus among Jewish scholars as a very positive thing. He believed it to be an indication that the worst is past in the alienation of the Jews from Christianity, and that 'Jesus' true greatness of person, character, work, and teaching will become increasingly apparent' (Votaw 1905:115). As he says in his final paragraph, 'he was indeed a Jewish Christ'.

2.1.2 Benjamin W. Bacon

The second pioneering work comes from Benjamin Bacon, of the Yale School of Religion. In 1915 he wrote an article called, 'Jewish Interpretations of the New Testament'. He begins with comments from early Church Fathers who concede that the scriptures are best understood and expounded by someone with an understanding of the Jewish background. The same is true today. 'Do his best', he says, 'the outsider cannot enter into the spirit of Judaism, and understand its ideas in their continuous unfolding through the ages, as the genuine son of Abraham after both flesh and spirit'. (Bacon: 1915:163)

There have been a number of Gentile scholars throughout Church history, sometimes called Christian Hebraists, who have attempted to interpret the scriptures through a Jewish lens. Beginning with Origen and Jerome, the more modern representatives included Lightfoot, Strack, Wunsche and Delitsch. Bacon believed that this scholarship has been important, yet incomplete. He suggests that an understanding of modern Judaism, along with first century Jewish laws and customs, is equally important. They must learn to 'appreciate sympathetically that branch of the elder stock which since the days of the New Testament has been in violent opposition to the Church' (Bacon 1915:167). He then turns his attention to the Jewish study of Christianity.

Bacon focuses on the works of Claude Montefiore and Moritz Friedlander. Both men represent liberal Judaism. Yet, their views of first century Judaism (and by extension their views of Jesus), are quite different. For Montefiore, the 'legalistic development of Judaism' as characterized by the synagogue, scribes and Pharisees represents the 'true line of growth'. He was not interested in mysticism and had no qualms about the destruction of the Temple (Bacon 1915:168). There is a chain linking the ancient prophets, the first century sages Hillel and Akiva, the medieval rabbis, and the modern liberal synagogue. Unfortunately, cultural factors along the way lead to 'narrow and mechanical modes of interpretation' that would cause rabbinic orthodoxy to go off course (Bacon 1915:169).

For Montefiore, Christianity has a unique 'religious vitality' that is attractive. 'Not unnaturally', Bacon writes, 'he attributes this vitality to the ethical teachings of Jesus and the pathos of his martyrdom rather than to the symbol of the cross and the doctrine of the atonement'. Jesus is to him 'the last and the greatest of the prophets' (Bacon 1915: 170). In the end, however, it is Montefiore's view of Paul (specifically on the issue of atonement) that prohibits him from embracing Christianity. Montefiore 'does not find a doctrine of mediation in genuine Judaism' (Bacon 1915:172).

Bacon appreciated Montefiore's position, but believed a more comprehensive approach to the subject was needed. To understand the Judaism of Jesus' day, he says, one must go back to the Persian period and survey the developments up through the Hellenistic experience and into the first century. This is where Friedlander provides the greater contribution. Hellenistic Judaism, according to Friedlander, espoused a 'broader interpretation of Mosaism', a 'keener missionary spirit' and a 'more universalistic ideal' than Montefiore's view of the scribes and Pharisees (Bacon 1915:173). For this reason, it is the true heir of Israel's religious ideals. Both Jesus and Paul are planted firmly within this tradition. It is only with the second century apologists and the Church Fathers that this tradition ceased, relinquishing the claim to be a 'legitimate development of Judaism' (Bacon 1915:174).

Despite his gift as a historian of religion, Friedlander's style was sometimes unnecessarily harsh, specifically on the Pharisees. As Bacon comments, 'Friedlander lacks the sweet reasonableness of Montefiore's style' (Bacon 1915:175). Yet, the contributions of each of these men are extolled as a model to be emulated by Christians.

As the two Jewish interpreters of Christianity to the synagogue in our time have set the example in a spirit of marvelous superiority to inherited predilection, so we may seek sympathetically to interpret Judaism.

(Bacon 1915:176)

2.1.3 Herbert Danby

Herbert Danby is most famous for his English translations of both the Mishnah and Joseph Klausner's groundbreaking book about Jesus. He was a Christian scholar with a great love and affection for the Jewish people. In 1927 he produced the first complete book to document the modern Jewish attitude toward Jesus, called *The Jew and Christianity* (Danby 1927). Throughout the book he is concerned with the long and horrible history of 'Christian' anti-Semitism and violence. In Danby's time, however, there was a new openness among Jews to discuss the issue. 'The more Christians have conformed to the spirit of Christ,' he says, 'the more has Jewish respect been drawn to Christianity and to Christ' (Danby 1927:3).

For most of the book, Danby surveys the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Chapters focus on the first century, the Talmudic period and the Crusades before he arrives at the modern period. In the nineteenth century major social changes dramatically altered the Jewish attitude toward Jesus. He cites three specific factors: modernity, Emancipation (new rights for Jews in Europe), and Reform Judaism. All of these would allow Jews to take a fresh look at Jesus. This was because they 'turned their faces away from Christians and gave their attention to the person of the Founder of Christianity' (Danby 1927:68).

Danby realized that this trend was limited in scope (most Jews still did not turn their attention toward Jesus), but it was an important step in the right direction. Many were now able to see Christianity through glasses 'no longer smeared by the mud and fog of former Christian treatment of them' (Danby 1927:4). He then briefly surveys the writings of some of the Jewish scholars who dared to write about Jesus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Joseph Salvador, Abraham Geiger, Joseph Jacobs, Claude Montefiore and Ahad ha-Am. The final chapter of the book addresses his contemporary period. Not surprisingly, it deals almost exclusively with Joseph Klausner's book, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Klausner's book was immediately condemned by Orthodox Jews. Yet, Danby notes that to many Jews it was 'accepted as a great and important addition to Hebrew literature and to Jewish history' (Danby 1927:104). Danby ends on a note of

sadness. He believed that Jesus is Israel's Messiah – good news for Jewish people – yet he had great empathy for those who could not see beyond the blood stained pages of history.

2.1.4 Thomas Walker

The next book on the subject was written by Thomas Walker. In 1923 he wrote *The teachings of Jesus and the Jewish teachings of His age*. Later, four years after Danby's book, he wrote *Jewish views of Jesus* (Walker 1931) He divides his study into three parts, using two scholars to represent each section. There is the orthodox view (Paul Goodman and Gerald Friedlander), the liberal view (Montefiore and Israel Abrahams), and then a section on 'portraits', meaning biographies of the life of Jesus (represented by Klausner and Joseph Jacobs).

Walker ends his book with some reflections. He specifically wanted to see the diversity of opinions about Jesus from within the Jewish community. Some of the writers viewed Jesus as a prophet, while others did not. The question of originality in his teaching was also a point of contention (Walker 1931:113). His (Jesus') view of God is alternatively explained as either 'blasphemy' or in a unique way 'very much part of Judaism'. Most of the authors agree that Jesus put in a claim of Messiahship, but they are not agreed exactly on what idea of Messiahship he clearly entertained. Even the discrepancies found in the New Testament are not without difficulties. All of the authors point to 'errors' but they 'do not all point to the same things' (Walker 1931:114).

This diversity, Walker concludes, shows that Judaism is no more homogenous than Christianity. He applauds the Jewish scholars for their contribution to the study and believed that it will help lead to more honesty in this field among both Jewish and Christian scholars.

2.1.5 Gosta Lindeskog

Most of the nineteenth century Jewish writings about Jesus (books and articles) appeared in German. Gosta Lindeskog documented this in his book, *Die Jesus Frage im Neuzeitlichen Judentum* (The Jesus-question in modern Judaism; own translation). This research goes beyond the boundaries of our present study, but it needs to be acknowledged as an important, pioneering effort that influenced several of the other studies listed here. According to Pinchas Lapide, Lindeskog's work interacts with 'over 150 books in German from the first period of almost a century, from 1822 – 1918, but 122 titles for the twenty years 1918 to 1938' (Lapide 1979:131). Lindeskog placed the Jewish study of Jesus into three groups:

The first type, the most frequent, emphasizes the *common* elements. Jesus has taught nothing which does not have its exact parallel in the Jewish writings. The second type,

which is characteristic of the Orthodox ... admits that the teachings of Jesus contains *un-Jewish* elements, which from the Jewish standpoint must be rejected....The third type ... stresses the positive, creative *originality* of Jesus.

(Lindeskog, in Hagner 1984:307)

2.1.6 Jakob Jocz

The first study of this literature by a Jewish believer in Jesus was done by Jakob Jocz, in his 1949 publication *The Jewish people and Jesus Christ*. It contains a historical overview of Jewish-Christian relations and includes topics such as the Jewishness of Jesus, the historic events leading to the split between the Jewish people and Jesus, traditional Jewish views of Jesus, the Church's attitude toward the Jewish people, and the usually neglected issue of Jews who believe in Jesus.

Jocz's survey of Jewish attitudes toward Jesus begins in the Enlightenment, and more specifically the *Haskala*. This was the Jewish response to the Enlightenment, the time when the Ghetto walls of Europe finally came down and Jews entered the modern world. 'What was achieved in Europe by a slow process of development covering several centuries', he wrote, 'was appropriated by Jewry within the space of fifty years' (Jocz 1954:103). Beginning with Moses Mendelsohn in the late eighteenth century, a new Judaism was developing. The Reform movement of the nineteenth century would clash with traditional Orthodox Judaism as they entered modernity, and each would have a unique stance regarding the question of Christianity.

While for the Orthodox, Jesus is the Founder of Christianity and inseparable from the Church, the liberals differentiate between Jesus and historic Christianity, assigning its foundation chiefly to Paul.

(Jocz 1954:111)

He then surveys the opinions in each camp. Orthodox Jews remained for the most part closed to the discussion; their main participation was criticizing the liberal camp for being too sympathetic toward Jesus. Any sign of a positive criticism was 'decried as a betrayal of Judaism' (Jocz 1954:111). The discussion of liberal Jews begins with C.G. Montefiore. According to Jocz, he 'contributed more than any other Jewish scholar towards a dispassionate and critical study of the person of Jesus Christ' (Jocz 1954:119). The next most important writer was Joseph Klausner. One of his important contributions was his recognition that Paul (like Jesus) was undeniably Jewish. This, Jocz writes, marks a new departure in the study of Pauline theology 'not only in respect to Jewish scholarship, but to scholarship in general' (Jocz 1954:133).

The survey continues with Kaufman Kohler, Israel Abrahams, and others. Joseph Salvador is given credit for writing the very first 'Jewish monograph' dealing with the life and teaching of Jesus (Jocz 1954:130). Additional writers such as Robert Eisler, E.R.

Trattner and Hyman Enelow are also considered. Jocz was aware that this field of study was still a new phenomenon, and he offers the following conclusion:

So far only individual Jews have spoken, but Judaism has not raised its voice. The effect of Jewish study resulted rather in the breaking down of prejudice than in the building up of positive conceptions. The last word concerning Jesus of Nazareth still belongs to a future age.

(Jocz 1954:145)

Thirty-two years later, Jocz wrote a sequel to this book. His purpose was to 'bring the convoluted story of Jewish – Christian relationships after World War II up-to-date' (Jocz 1981:7). This volume discusses the Holocaust, the Church's lack of response to the tragedy, the new attitude of the Church toward the Jews, new theologies that developed and, again, Jewish views of Jesus. Some of the scholars discussed here include Shalom Ben-Chorin, David Flusser, Samuel Sandmel, Hyam Maccoby and Ferdinand Zweig. But these new scholars, Jocz believed, added little to the discussion.

On the whole the Jewish study of Jesus has not progressed since Joseph Klausner's biography *Jesus of Nazareth* (English translation, 1925), though the background has been enlarged since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

(Jocz 1981:107)

2.1.7 Walter Jacob

In 1974, Rabbi Walter Jacob published *Christianity through Jewish eyes*. It focused on the individuals involved in the modern investigation of Jesus, and it remains one of the best sources to learn about the key players of this movement. At the start, he says of the nineteenth century pioneers, objectivity was difficult.

The beginnings of this Jewish study of Christianity were rather angry, as if polemic were necessary to arouse interest in the problem and the air had to be cleared before a true discussion could begin.

(Jacob 1974:2)

By the time of his writing, Jews had begun to more seriously study the issues of Jesus and Christianity. Objectivity was still not fully achieved, but remarkable progress had been made. After giving background information, he devotes a whole chapter to each figure. Moses Mendelssohn was 'the first modern Jew,' whose famous correspondence with Lavater was the beginning of the Jewish-Christian dialogue (Jacob 1974:23). Mendelssohn believed that Paul ultimately created Christianity, but that the traditions of the Gospels can be considered reliable, 'just as the Jewish oral tradition of that age seems reliable' (Jacob 1974:26).

Isaac Meyer Wise was one of the first in the United States to approach the subject. His interest in Christianity was mostly reactionary, in direct response to missionary activity. Jacob suggests that part of Wise's 'harshness' was the result of a centuries-long silence, since 'no such expression had been possible to a Jew for a long time' (Jacob 1974:75). In the realm of philosophy, Herman Cohen was 'perhaps the first to emphasize Christianity's influence on Judaism' (Jacob 1974:89). Claude Montefiore was 'the first Jew to view Christianity entirely sympathetically' (Jacob 1974:93). To round out the study, Jacob also surveys the life and writings of Geiger, Klausner, Rosenzweig, Baeck, Sandmel, Flusser and several others.

Jacob's approach to the subject was largely sociological, as opposed to theological. His study encompassed authors within a period of approximately two hundred years. In that time, the Jewish approach to Jesus has softened and became more scholarly. But regarding the Jewish-Christian dialogue itself, 'surprisingly little has happened'. He believes that 'in many ways we are not far removed from Mendelssohn and his first approaches to this complex matter' (Jacob 1974:228).

2.1.8 Donald Hagner

In 1984, Donald Hagner wrote *The Jewish reclamation of Jesus*. By this time, others had already noted the phenomenon of the Jewish interest in Jesus. Hagner wanted to examine the theological positions of these writers, especially in light of his own (evangelical) Christianity.

Regarding the authority of Jesus and his relationship to the Law, Hagner sees three main categories of Jewish writers. The first group, those who believe Jesus made a 'modest' break with the law, include Montefiore, Samuel Sandmel and Joseph Jacobs. The next group – those who believe that Jesus did not break the law – are represented by Israel Abrahams, Klausner, Jules Isaac and Kaufman Kohler. Finally, there are several scholars who believe there is no essential difference between Jesus' view of the Law and rabbinic Judaism. This group includes Shalom Ben-Chorin, David Flusser, Pinchas Lapide, Geza Vermes and E.R. Trattner.

Judaism and Christianity often share a similar language, although each is invested with quite different meanings. Such is the case with the phrase 'kingdom of God'. 'Most Jewish scholars admit the centrality of the kingdom for Jesus', Hagner says, 'but argue that he taught only that the kingdom was imminent, not that it was already present in and through his ministry' (Hagner 1984:134). The question of Messiahship is also addressed, and Hagner states that 'the majority of modern Jewish scholars conclude that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah' (Hagner 1984:243). But, they also believe that he was 'deluded' on this point. Ultimately, he believes, many liberal Jewish

scholars have embraced Jesus as one of their own. But, this is achieved by discarding the elements that seem foreign to Judaism.

Hagner concludes by affirming both the Jewishness of Jesus and the uniqueness of the Christian gospel. 'Christianity rightly understood is not the cancellation of Judaism', he writes in the book's final paragraph. 'It is at the heart of all that Jews hold dear. Jesus the Jew is the Christ of Christianity without being any less a Jew; Jesus the Christ is fully a Jew without being any less the Christ of the church'.

One of the reviews for this book came from G. David Schwartz. He questioned the use of the term 'reclamation', based on the fact that Jewish opinions are quite varied. In other words, what exactly is being reclaimed?

I would argue there is no uniform perspective which deserves the name 'reclamation.' My contention is that Hagner has chosen an inappropriate word as the title of a text which otherwise conveys several cogent criticisms of various Jewish analyses of Jesus.

(Schwartz 1987:104)

2.2 SPECIFIC VANTAGE POINTS

2.2.1 Israelis (Pinchas Lapide)

Pinchas Lapide is extremely important for this entire study, both for his chronicling of Jewish beliefs (here) and his unique view of the resurrection of Jesus (see below). His book, *Israelis, Jews and Jesus*, documents the Jewish encounter with Jesus in the modern state of Israel. It contains three main sections. The first is a survey of modern literature in Hebrew. Of course, Joseph Klausner heads the list. In discussing the recent past, he sees four ways that the Holocaust has affected Jewish, and specifically Israeli, opinions about Jesus. The first way he calls a 'sea of tears'. Because of the immense emotional impact, 'people sought refuge in a factual, scientific image of the Nazarene' (Lapide 1979:7). This may have helped secure the appropriate facts of the matter, but it has also kept Jesus the person – the fellow Jew – at a distance.

The second result of the Holocaust was to make Jesus more approachable, a fellow sufferer. His humanity led many to see his Jewishness more clearly. He became 'a human brother who lived an exemplary Jewish life in a world full of inhumanity' (Lapide 1979:7-8). On the other hand, many Holocaust survivors could only see Jesus through the lens of the atrocity itself. This third way saw Jesus as anything but a brother. They could not separate Christ from the Christendom that committed or tolerated the murder of six million Jews (Lapide 1979:7-8). The final way – which Lapide sees as perhaps the majority opinion – is an attitude of acceptance. 'But, on the whole', he wrote, 'we are dealing with the Jewish recovery of Jesus, of bringing him home' (Lapide 1979: 7-8).

After this summary, he provides a survey of modern Israeli writings. It is quite an extensive list, made up of various types of literature.

The 187 Hebrew books, research articles, poems, plays, monographs, dissertations, and essays that have been written about Jesus in the last twenty-seven years since the foundation of the State of Israel, justify press reports of a 'Jesus wave' in the present-day literature of the Jewish State.

(Lapide 1979:31)

Lapide credits the 'climate of independence' as the main reason for this Jesus wave amongst Israelis. It simply could not have happened in the diaspora. In a State of their own, he reasons, Jews can be free to explore the issue of Jesus – for good and for bad – with a degree of honesty and objectivity previously unknown.

The second main section is called 'Jesus in Israeli schoolbooks'. It focuses on how Jesus is portrayed as a historical figure. The books used by ultra-orthodox schools do not even mention him. But for most other curriculums, there is a clear delineation between Jesus the Jew and the Christology of the Church. Most of the books blame Pilate for his death and exonerate the Sanhedrin. Judas Iscariot is also said to be fictitious. In Lapide's opinion, the information in Israeli schoolbooks reveals three truths, each of them positive. First, the person of Jesus is not responsible for the centuries of Christian hatred. Second, Jesus himself was undeniably a Jew. Third, Jesus was not only Jewish (by birth), he was committed to carrying out and teaching the principles of Torah. In other words, he was a good Jew (Lapide 1979:65).

The third and final main section is called 'Rabbis speak of Jesus'. Here he strays from the book's focus on Israel and includes rabbis from other parts of the world as well. One of the fascinating accounts is that of Italo Zolli, who was also known as Israel Zoller. In 1932, Zoller wrote a book called *The Nazarene*. A devout Italian Jew, he underwent baptism to escape persecution by Mussolini. He later became Chief Rabbi of Rome. After that, as a result of studying about Jesus for many years, he became a follower (by faith) in Jesus as the Messiah. Lapide acknowledges Zoller's history of helping fellow Jews, even after he embraced Christianity by faith. 'In all fairness', Lapide writes, 'it must be remarked that he reaped no worldly advantage from his conversion' (Lapide 1979:140).

Lapide's book provides a unique perspective on the Jewish study of Jesus. It was written over a generation ago, when Israeli attitudes and perspectives were still largely influenced by the European experience of the authors. For him, the whole issue of the Jewish study of Jesus was 'a child of Jewish polemical writing about Jesus and

nineteenth-century Protestant biblical scholarship' (Lapide 1979:130). But, since this work, a new generation has grown up in Israel, devoid of both Protestant scholarship and the need for polemical writings about Jesus.

2.2.2 Matthew Hoffman

Jewish theologians and historians were not the only ones to take notice of Jesus. Matthew Hoffman's book, *From rebel to Rabbi*, documents the work done by Jewish artists and writers in the early years of the twentieth century. He begins with a summary of Jewish views about Jesus from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These writings, Hoffman says, 'tell us more about Jews than about Jesus' (Hoffman 2007:2).

The book's stated purpose is to 'explore the pervasiveness and centrality of the figure of Jesus to modern Jewish movements as diverse as Reform Judaism and Yiddish modernism' (Hoffman 2007:2). It surveys artists and writers who wrote in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. This is an eclectic group comprised of Jewish voices that deviated, whether radically or in more subtle ways, from traditional Jewish expressions. Such artists 'often formed an avant-garde or constituted an intelligentsia' (Hoffman 2007:11).

One topic of interest was the cross. There was a fierce debate in a Yiddish newspaper about the appropriateness and the meaning of the works of two specific authors. Lamed Shapiro and Sholem Asch pioneered the use of Jesus, and specifically the cross, in Yiddish literature (Hoffman 2007:61). The debate concerned the fear that it might cause Jews to embrace Christianity, or at least make Christianity a viable option. A similar debate in the Hebrew press erupted in 1910. Zionist authors Ahad ha-Am and Yosef Chaim Brenner squared off on the issues of apostasy and the place of Jesus in the worldview of modern Jews.

A new wave of Yiddish literature emerged after 1905. They distinguished themselves from earlier giants of the field like Sholem Aleichem. The new group sought to synthesize 'the tension between secular universalism and cultural nationalism' (Hoffman 2007:116). In doing so, they often incorporated Christian motifs to help explain Jewish life. Themes such as suffering, tragedy, war and redemption, Hoffman says, touched on many of the complex issues raised in the fierce debates raging in the Jewish press during the preceding years (Hoffman 2007:119).

The passion of Jesus – his trials, suffering and death – was another theme that emerged in Jewish art and literature. Since medieval times, the binding of Isaac (the *Akedah*) has been a traditional symbol to express Jewish suffering. In the twentieth century, a number of writers and artists focused on the crucifixion to dramatize Jewish

suffering. Notable in this group are the painter Marc Chagall and the American poet Emma Lazarus. The key word in all of this was tension.

Throughout these works, Jesus is simultaneously idealized as a symbol of Jewish martyrdom and reviled as the emblem of the Christian persecutors of the Jews; again, this duality of Jesus as Jewish martyr and Christian god is a source of profound ambivalence and tension for the Jewish writers who engage him.

(Hoffman 2007:205)

But, this duality would not last. The Holocaust once again ‘tainted the figure of Jesus with the stain of Jewish blood as in earlier times’ (Hoffman 1979:252). For this reason, many of the artists and writers in this subgroup would turn away from Christian themes. Marc Chagall and Sholem Asch are notable exceptions.

All of these writers, painters and poets knew the power of art to communicate a multitude of emotions and ambivalence. Jesus was discussed and debated in creative ways that made him accessible to the Jewish community. More recently, another artistic rendering – and reactions to it – have had the opposite effect. Mel Gibson’s 2004 film, *The passion of the Christ*, ‘places Jesus outside of the Jewish camp and casts the Jews as Christ’s persecutors’. This has been a major setback. The Jewish intelligentsia of the early twentieth century sought to reclaim Jesus. As a result of this film, ‘the Jewish communal leadership of the twenty-first century wants him as far out of the public eye as possible’ (Hoffman 2007:256). Such is the power of art.

2.2.3 Neta Stahl

Neta Stahl is an Israeli scholar who teaches literature at Johns Hopkins University. Her book, *Other and brother*, examines the figure of Jesus as portrayed by Israeli writers, and to a lesser extent some Yiddish writers as well. It is similar to Hoffman’s work, although more in depth regarding the Israeli sources. She focuses on the changing ambivalence between seeing Jesus as an outsider, and yet in many ways someone who rightfully, somehow, should be included in the fold. Zionism – the return to the ancient land of the Jewish people yielded new opportunities of expression.

The first chapter presents an overview of the modern Jewish study of Jesus, with an emphasis on the Israeli scene. Jesus was often used as a key to understanding the ‘new national identity’ of the Jew returning to Israel (Stahl 2013:10). He represented the ‘pre-exilic Jew’ (Stahl 2013:11). Klausner was the first of these writers to become popular. His Jesus was a Jewish nationalist and would greatly influence the next

generation of Israeli writers. This group was able to embrace the Jewish Jesus, 'while rejecting the Jesus of Christianity, the threatening old Other' (Stahl 2013:13).

Several important authors are surveyed in the introduction. One of the recurring themes, particularly among artists, was Jesus as a Jewish victim. This presents a paradox, as he also represents the very group responsible for persecuting the Jews. But, as Stahl says, the victimized, humanistic Jesus served a purpose and helped bridge a gap. This view helped to 'assimilate both Jesus and humanism into Judaism' (Stahl 2013:41).

Chapter two focuses on the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg. Born in Eastern Europe and later a survivor of the Holocaust, his personal biography greatly influenced his writings. His early works, in Yiddish, drew attention to the sufferings of Jesus. Greenberg, like the Jesus in his writings, looked toward the land of Israel. Jesus the man was not a problem for him, but the institutions of Christianity definitely were. This included theological claims. Greenberg was 'bound' to Jesus by his humanity, but 'repelled' by his divinity (Stahl 2013:54).

The next chapter surveys the figure of Jesus in general Israeli literature. After the creation of the modern state of Israel, a new breed of Israeli authors had a new sense of identification and empathy with Jesus. He became detached from the western Church that persecuted the Jewish people. These new writers did not make the connection 'between the cross and the Church, the swastika, and Jesus' (Stahl 2013:84). Jesus became more of a brother and less of an Other.

The remainder of the book includes chapters on the works of Yoel Hoffman and Avot Yehurun. The epilogue is called 'The ironic gaze at brother Jesus'. Here, Stahl addresses the tension and conflict between what an author says and what is not said blatantly. She begins with a discussion of the ancient text, the Toledot Yeshu. The use of irony or mockery about Jesus is used in place of explicit denial, a practice that may be used by modern Jewish writers as well. For example, H. Leyvik was one of the first modern Jewish poets to use such irony in regards to Jesus. In one of his works, Jesus is represented as a modern man undergoing psychoanalysis and revealing episodes based on the New Testament. Stahl concludes,

In depicting the figure of Jesus as a neurotic man searching for a cure in psychoanalytical therapy, both Jesus and the rising trend are being ridiculed and being rejected as mere myth. Psychotherapy is presented not as a solution for man's problems but as yet another

problem of modern times. By setting Jesus in a therapeutic context and depicting him as a hysterical patient, Leyvik stresses Jesus humanity and even human weakness.

(Stahl 2013:173)

There is one further point of irony that could be made about Stahl's book. It is most likely a simple typo, and too much should not be made of it. But, it is nevertheless ironic. One of the poets (Wallach) envisions a scene that takes place in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Stahl refers to this as 'the place where, according to Christian tradition, Jesus is buried' (Stahl 2013:110). Of course, Christians, by definition, do not believe that Jesus 'is' buried anywhere. Again, this is probably a simple mistake. But, given the vast amount written about the cross and the death of Jesus in Yiddish and Israeli literature, this may perhaps serve as a metaphor for the overemphasis on such themes, and the overwhelming silence on the issue of his resurrection.

2.3 SPECIFIC ISSUES

2.3.1 The trial of Jesus (David Catchpole)

The trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin presents a number of challenges, specifically in regards to setting the culpability (or at least partial culpability) for the crucifixion. For this reason Jewish scholars have given it unique attention. Questions concern not only the legality and historicity of the trial itself, but subsequent Christian history as well. New Testament scholar David Catchpole has documented Jewish views of this event in a 1971 book that was based on his PhD-thesis from Cambridge. He is well aware that the trial of Jesus has been used to justify centuries of persecution. 'For Jesus' own *via dolorosa*', he wrote, has tragically become 'a blood-stained path for his fellow countrymen of later generations' (Catchpole 1971:xi).

Catchpole begins his survey with sections of the Talmud that speak of Jesus. While there is much debate about which passages are unmistakably referring to Jesus, one of the most famous passages comes from *b. Sanh.* 43a. Here, Jesus (called Yeshu) was hanged on the eve of Passover because he 'practiced sorcery' and 'led Israel astray.' This happened after a period of forty days where 'a herald went out' to find anyone who might plead on his behalf. It is clear from this account that the Jewish leadership was taking responsibility for his death. This would be the Jewish position for quite some time.

In a nutshell, the Jewish defense is found in a statement of the reasons *for* and the justice of their involvement, rather than, as has been the modern pattern, a denial of that involvement or reduction of it to the handing over of Jesus to Pilate.

(Catchpole 1971:5; emphasis in the original)

Jumping ahead to Moses Mendelsohn, a different approach begins to emerge. As an enlightened Jew, he was not as bound to the Talmud as his predecessors were. He was also more sympathetic toward Jesus and ‘allowed for the possibility of an unjust condemnation’. He deviates from the traditional position of the Talmud by stating the ‘uncertainty’ of the affair (Catchpole 1971:14). Later commentators will stray even further from the Talmud’s position on the subject, and an apologetic of denial will emerge.

In the nineteenth century, Heinrich Graetz’s *History of the Jewish people* would have a major impact in the Jewish world. He wrote from an Orthodox Jewish perspective and was critical towards both Reform Judaism and Christianity. Catchpole notices that in the space of just a few years, a later edition of Graetz’s book changed its position on the trial. Social factors made it difficult to maintain the view that augmented Jewish involvement. It was thought that this would ‘open himself to charges of giving opportunity to Christian opposition’, especially in light of the fact that ‘liberal Jews of the standing of Geiger were producing the apologetic of non-involvement’ (Catchpole 1971:32).

By the mid-twentieth century, the pendulum would continue to swing away from claiming any involvement. In 1948, H.E. Goldin’s book, *The Case of the Nazarene reopened*, completely rejected the historicity of the Sanhedrin trial. This was, in Catchpole’s words, ‘an old-fashioned Troki-type approach, devoting considerable space to proving Jesus’ falsity’. He saw this as ‘growing pressure among Jews for a re-trial’ (Catchpole 1971:69). More than a decade later, Samuel Sandmel would re-cast the debate in another direction. Sandmel wrote,

Perhaps we might be willing to say to ourselves that it is not at all impossible that some Jews, even leading Jews, recommended the death of Jesus to Pilate. We are averse to saying this to ourselves, for so total has been the charge against us that we have been constrained to make a total denial.

(Sandmel, cited in Catchpole 1971:69)

This issue has had enduring consequences. Some Jewish scholars (for example, Wise and Maccoby, see below) will use the debate over the trial as a pretext for denying the crucifixion and, by inference, the resurrection. But, most scholars do acknowledge that – whatever may have happened after the arrest – Jesus was taken to the cross where he died. Questions about the trials, therefore play a vital role in Jewish-Christian relations, but this does not interfere with the ultimate flow of the narrative and the question of the resurrection.

2.3.2 The apostle Paul (Daniel Langton)

The Jewishness of Jesus is accepted in virtually all circles of Jewish scholarship. Whatever type of Jew he was, however the true picture might be distorted, all are agreed that he was a Jew. But, as his reputation grew more positive in the Jewish community, it was the apostle Paul who would become the villain. In the last century, however, Paul would also undergo a reclamation within the Jewish community, although by no means to the extent that Jesus has. The jury is still out on Paul. Daniel Langton has documented these changing attitudes in his book, *The apostle Paul in the Jewish imagination*.¹ Paul is nothing if not extreme, and Jewish opinions are quite varied.

He is both a bridge and a barrier to interfaith harmony; both the founder of Christianity and a convert to it; both an anti-Jewish apostate and a fellow traveler on the path to Jewish self-understanding; and both the chief architect of the Judeo-Christian foundations of Western thought and their destroyer.

(Langton 2010:1)

Jewish interest in Paul began during the Enlightenment, and at first he was universally seen in a negative light. Langton lists three reasons for this. The first was in response to the growing recognition of Jesus as a Jew. Christianity was still seen as the opposition, and there was a 'need to find a replacement for Jesus as Jewish public enemy number one'. Second, liberal Christian scholars of the day were busy debunking the New Testament and they were looking for parallels (to Paul) in pagan sources rather than Jewish ones. Third, Paul's view of the Law – at least as it was understood at the time – was a 'misrepresentation of Judaism and the Law' (Langton 1971:40).

Langton sees other forces as well, even today, which have caused such a negative reaction to Paul. These go beyond the historical study of the New Testament and enter the realms of sociology and psychology. Paul's life and teachings raise issues of vital concern to the Jewish community, including 'apostasy, conversion, Jewish missionary work, those who abandon or subordinate the Torah, those who blur the boundary lines of Judaism and Christianity – and even the "threat of Jewish self hatred"' (Langton 1971:45).

The classic (negative) Jewish view of Paul comes from writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Graetz, Benamozegh, Baeck, Kohler, and Buber. After summarizing their contributions, he moves on to different categories, including the 'intra-Jewish' debate. These authors have been much more open to seeing Paul, like Jesus, as a Jew. This group includes Emil Hirsch, Montefiore, Klausner, Micah Berdichevsky, Hans Joachim Schoeps, David Flusser, Samuel Sandmel, Daniel Boyarin, Alan Segal and Mark Nanos.

¹ A similar survey was done in a later article, see Bird and Sprinkle (2008).

Langton further subdivides some of these newer voices by category. For example, he recognizes the role of Jewish scholars who write from a feminist perspective. These include Pamela Eisenbaum, Tal Ilan and Amy-Jill Levine. He even includes Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish scholars such as Paul Levertoff, Sanford Mills and Joseph Shulam. Their inclusion is a surprising (and welcome!) addition in a book written by a Jewish scholar who is himself not a Messianic Jew. The book continues with Jewish authors, artists and psychologists who have also interacted with Paul in one way or another.

The Jewish acceptance of Paul as a fellow Jew is still in progress. There have been major advancements in recent years and overall there is a definite difference between now and a hundred years ago. But, as Langton concludes:

Doubtless, the classic, negative Jewish view of Paul is alive and well, and there is no reason to believe that Paul will not continue to function as a figure of abuse in public discourse, in Jewish-Christian religious polemic, and in intra-Jewish debate for a long time to come.

(Langton 2010:283)

2.4 MISCELLANEOUS

2.4.1 Anthologies

In 1977, Trude Weiss-Rosmarin edited a book of articles that focused on 'two principle Jewish interests' in the founder of Christianity; Jesus' Jewishness, and his trial and death on a Roman cross (Weiss-Rosmarin 1977:ix). The articles come from the most important names in the field, including Sandmel, Zeitlin, Klausner, and Buber. Weiss-Rosmarin believed that virtually nothing could be known about Jesus, although the 'historical Jesus' needs to be addressed since Christians do believe he really did all that is ascribed to him in the Gospels. She saw Jesus merely as an object of (other peoples') faith. 'By way of analogy', she wrote, 'it should be said that the 'Historical Moses' is also an enigma. He is as enigmatic as the 'Historical Jesus' (Weiss-Rosmarin 1977:xi).

Thirteen years later, Fritz Rotschild compiled another important anthology. He focused on the writings of Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rozensweig, Will Herberg and Abraham Joshua Heschel. These writers addressed issues of theology and philosophy (which is why they are not featured in this study). Each article is coupled with a contemporary Christian writer's response. Rotschild believed that the holocaust created both the need and the opportunity for such dialogue.

[T]he shame felt by many Christians of good will after the murder of six million Jews in “Christian” Europe has been a powerful motive for much of the Christian-Jewish dialogue since the end of the Second World War.

(Rotschild 1990:5)

Rotschild listed three reasons that compel thoughtful Jews to concern themselves with Christianity. First, Christianity is a ‘daughter religion of Israel’. Second, despite the obvious differences between Judaism and Christianity, they do share a number of similarities especially when compared with other religions. Third, Christianity ‘spread the Hebrew Bible and its message of faith in the One God and his teaching all over the globe’ (Rotschild 1990:6).

By the end of the century, the Jewish study of Jesus was in transition. It was no longer taboo, nor a novelty, to engage in such research. The initial stages had already been discussed and documented. The Jewish community (or, at least the scholars) had reclaimed Jesus, but it remained unclear what that meant and what the new relationship should be. At the same time, New Testament scholars in general were beginning what would be called the *Third Quest/Renewed Quest* for the historical Jesus, which focused on his Jewishness (Witherington 1997).

Several anthologies by Jewish scholars (sometimes along with non-Jewish scholars) appeared at this time. They included a mix of new material and analysis of past opinions. These include *Jews and Christians speak of Jesus* (Zannoni 1994), *The Historical Jesus through Catholic and Jewish eyes* (LeBeau 2000), and *Jesus through Jewish eyes: Rabbis and scholars engage an ancient brother in a new conversation* (Bruteau 2001). One important article at the turn of the century (in an anthology about Jesus in history and Christology) is called ‘Jewish perspectives on Jesus’ (Sperling 2001).

In 2011, Zev Garber edited a collection of essays that addressed ‘historical, literary, liturgical, philosophical, religious, theological and contemporary issues’ (Garber 2011:8). Both Jewish and Christian scholars contributed. The final article, by Shaul Magid, deals with the Jewish attitude (in America) toward Jesus in the last few decades of the twentieth-century and the first decade of our current century. New attitudes exist, he writes, because the Jewish community is more confident about its place in society than ever before. He focuses on four contemporary Jewish authors who have proposed radically new paradigms. The first two scholars challenge the very notion of ‘messiah’ and attempt to bridge the gap between Judaism and Christianity.

Both Yitz Greenberg and Byron Sherwin use this model of a bifurcated messiah in different ways to suggest that Jesus could, perhaps, accept Jesus as a “messiah” without agreeing with the Christian demands that he is the ultimate messiah.

(Magid 2011:361; emphasis in the original)

The remaining two scholars, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Daniel Matt, approach Jesus from a more mystical perspective. Influenced by *Kabbalah*, and taking advantage of the American fascination with New Age spirituality, these scholars present Jesus in vastly different terms. Even the Trinity may be seen in a new – not necessarily un-Jewish – way. Kabbalistic teachings enable the student to address Jesus’ divinity through a ‘Jewish mystic-theological lens’ (Magid 2012:369). Each of these new approaches is critically examined by Magid.

The following year, Neta Stahl edited a collection of articles that concentrate on Jesus in philosophy, theology and poetry. It represents an eclectic group made up of leading Jewish scholars from different disciplines. Uniquely, and especially relevant for this study, it includes an article that addresses Spinoza’s view of the resurrection of Jesus (Melamed 2012, see below). Regarding the contributors as a whole and their understanding of Jesus, Stahl says,

All share the assumption that this figure embodies great contradictions, and that the attempt to understand, represent, and resolve these contradictions transcends local, historical, cultural, and political boundaries.

(Stahl 2012:5)

2.4.2 Studies of individuals

Along with documenting the overall history of this scholarship, several important studies on the works of individual scholars have appeared. Martin Buber’s views on Christianity were the subject of at least one book (Von Balthasar 1960) and a number of articles (Kohanski 1975; Berry 1997). Other articles focusing on the contributions of Joseph Klausner (Sandmel 2004) and David Flusser (Gager 2005) are also valuable to the discussion. Susannah Heschel’s book on Abraham Geiger is of great importance. It includes detailed descriptions of the theological climate (both Jewish and Christian) that enabled the Jewish study of Jesus to gain momentum in the nineteenth century. Geiger’s specific role was foundational.

Geiger’s may not have been the first Jewish account of Jesus to present him as a loyal Jew, rather than as a founder of a new religion, but his version was the first by a Jew to be taken seriously enough by Christian scholars to evoke debate and condemnation.

(Heschel 1998:9)

One of the most influential scholars in this study is Claude Montefiore, and it is not surprising that there are important works dedicated to his views. The first is by Maurice Bowler, who analyzes Montefiore's thought and influences. In his summary, Bowler sees three dominant Jewish responses to Jesus. The first he calls 'the antithetical response' (characterized by Troki). The second, the 'parallel response', sees Judaism and Christianity 'as equally valid but distinct and mutually exclusive positions' (as per Franz Rosenzweig). Finally, the third response is called 'Jewish Synthesis', which 'sees the Jewish factor as the dominant one and the Christian factor as a preparation for Judaism'. Bowler puts Montefiore in this camp, along with Maimonides and Judah Halevi. It is a way to applaud and uphold the New Testament, and yet at the same time find faults with it. Jesus is acceptable for Gentiles, however, as he will perhaps be a stepping-stone in their understanding and ultimate acceptance of Judaism (Bowler 1988:84).

Daniel Langton has also written extensively on Montefiore (Langton 2002). The prevailing Jewish attitude in Montefiore's day was that Christian scholars had gotten it all wrong, and that Jesus was a good Pharisee. The Jewish study of Jesus was usually a polemic endeavor, a platform to uphold Judaism against the onslaught of Christianity. Montefiore, according to Langton, felt this view was 'unnecessary and dangerous' (Langton 1999:105). He advocated further study and greater tolerance toward the New Testament.

Montefiore saw a useful model in Jesus' compassion on the outcasts in his day. He wanted to employ similar methods to reach out to the 'Jewish masses disenchanted with traditional Judaism' (Langton 1999:106). For many, Montefiore was too sympathetic toward Christianity, and he was criticized as 'un-Jewish' for not taking a 'staunchly defined position' on Judaism against Jesus and Paul (Langton 1999:111). He was a singular figure, and it is perhaps fitting that our survey of Jewish views of Jesus ends with him. Langton wrote,

His tone with regard to much Christian teaching, and his qualified acceptance of some of it, were often deeply unsettling to Jewish ears. Certainly, he expressed his understanding of, and hopes for, Jewish theology in unfamiliar ways. All in all, he was an unusual Jewish thinker, and with his sympathetic writings about the traditional enemy, he stands alone, even today.

(Langton 1999:118)

Chapter 3

Presuppositions and/or obstacles

It has become common, to the point of being proverbial, to say that objectivity in New Testament scholarship is a virtual impossibility. Each scholar approaches the Gospels with preconceived ideas. This was noticed by Geza Vermes. 'Christians read them in light of their faith' he began, 'Jews, primed with age old suspicion; agnostics, ready to be scandalized; and professional New Testament experts, wearing the blinkers of their trade' (Vermes 1973:19).

When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus specifically, there are a number of presuppositions that may call off the investigation before it begins. This is true for both Jews and Gentiles, but there are also some specific issues which are either uniquely expressed amongst Jewish scholars or are perhaps exclusive to Jewish scholarship. Eugene Borowitz wrote the following:

Jews can see that the story of Jesus' resurrection is told against the background of Pharasaic belief. Despite this our people has never had difficulty rejecting it. Our Bible is quite clear that the chief sign of the coming of the Messiah is a world of justice and peace. No prophet says the Messiah will die and then be resurrected as a sign to all humanity. Except for the small number of converts to Christianity, Jews in ancient times did not believe Jesus had actually been resurrected. Modern Jews, who believe in the immortality of the soul or in no afterlife at all, similarly reject the Christian claim.

(Borowitz 1984:216)

Borowitz presents several reasons why Jews do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He did not offer an explanation as to whether or not the event happened. There is an important distinction. The former deals with the implications of the resurrection, the latter with its historicity. This study is concerned primarily with the historical question, although these issues (and others) do need to be addressed.

The purpose of this Chapter, then, is threefold. First, it will identify the potential reasons why the resurrection might be assumed to be either untrue or irrelevant for Jews. Second, it will show that these obstacles are not without an alternative explanation. There are mainstream Jewish scholars who fall on both sides of these issues and do not necessarily agree with such presuppositions. Third, and most importantly, it will demonstrate that these obstacles do not interfere with the quest for the historicity of the resurrection.

3.1 MIRACLES

The modern discussion of the possibility of miracles usually pivots on two issues – whether or not God exists in the first place, and if so, what is the likelihood or potential for Him to interact with His creation. Jewish scholars have largely paralleled their non-Jewish counterparts on these issues, but have also produced their own unique expressions. Absolute atheism is a relatively new phenomenon. But, the denial of God as a rebellious response to His sovereignty has quite a history. This seems to be the case in Psalm 14:1, where the Psalmist writes, ‘the fool says in his heart there is no God’.

Not until the twentieth century did outright atheism become a viable option among skeptics. The combination of a materialistic worldview inspired by Darwinism, and then the horrors of the Holocaust, produced the new alternative of atheism that would become widely accessible. Richard Rubinstein was the best-known Jewish representative of the ‘God is dead’ movement, and he famously wrestled with the question of belief in God. But, even his ideas were more a question of theodicy than ontology (Rubenstein 1966).

Over the next few decades the denial of God made inroads into mainstream Judaism, often in subtle ways as it became more acceptable. The prevalence of this can be seen in the book *The Nine Questions People ask about Judaism*. Authors Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin ask whether a Jewish person who does not believe in God can still be a good Jew. They conclude that ‘one can be a good Jew while doubting God’s existence, so long as one acts in accordance with Jewish law’ (Prager & Telushkin 1981:18). The authors themselves clearly do believe in God, but their inclusive response is indicative of the modern situation.

Along with what may be called casual, or practical, forms of atheism that exist in the Jewish community there are also options for the more forthright (non-) believer. Rabbi Sherwin Wine created Humanistic Judaism back in the 1960s. It espouses as a main precept the belief (or at least the option to unashamedly believe) that God does not exist (Wine 1985; Seid 2001). While this branch remains a minor offshoot in Judaism, some of its beliefs may surely be found among Jews in other branches, and certainly among those who are unaffiliated. The 2013 Jewish survey in the United States revealed that thirty-two percent Jews say they have no religion (Goodstein 2013).

Jewish atheists, whether affiliated as such or otherwise, stand in a unique position. Ironically, their very existence (as Jews) is evidence for God’s existence. Anyone who has studied Jewish history knows of Jewish survival under impossible odds. This has been difficult to explain away. Their re-gathering into the very land from which they were

expelled nineteen hundred years earlier is also an unprecedented experience, one that has been called a modern miracle. The fact that both of these are clearly promised in the Tanakh (see Jr 31:35-37 and Ezk 36 respectively) makes these realities that much more difficult to ignore. The Jewish atheist needs to first provide an answer for these things before dogmatically pronouncing that God does not exist.

From here we turn to the second issue regarding miracles, whether or not God can and does such things. The position of the Tanakh is clear, that God certainly interacts with His creation. The later rabbis would produce a much more rational system of belief, but there is no doubt that the rabbis of the Talmudic period also believed in miracles as actual supernatural events brought about by God (Guttman 1947; Baumgarten 1983).

Maimonides' view of miracles has long been the subject of debate. His attempt to integrate science with Traditional Judaism was seen as shocking and heretical to his original audience in the twelfth century. He certainly believed that God created the universe. This in some way implies a fixed order. Miracles, then, raise a number of questions. For example, how can God interact with the universe if its laws have already been set? Maimonides wrote quite a bit about miracles, and more than a few scholars remain perplexed about what he ultimately thought on the subject.

Opinions about Maimonides' view of miracles may be divided into three camps. Some commentators say he actually believed in miracles, others say he secretly denied the possibility, while still others think that he believed in the possibility but questioned their actuality (Kasher 1999:2). Rather than attempting to harmonize his various statements, another approach is to recognize the progression of his thought throughout his life. Y. Zvi Langerman wrote the following.

As his disbelief in the unlimited power of scientific explanation grew, he became more receptive to the possibility of miracles. For miracles are nothing other than events or features that, while not being totally at odds with science, cannot be fully accounted for in any theory. Maimonides' ultimate acceptance of miracles was, therefore, his ultimate acceptance of his own doubts and uncertainties.

(Langerman 2004:1)

The entrance of modernity would generate a new discussion about miracles among both Jews and Gentiles. David Hume's arguments against miracles in the late eighteenth century paved the way for a brand new paradigm. Enlightenment skepticism would quickly evolve into cynicism, and in some circles this would mean a dogmatic denial of all things supernatural. Rudolph Bultmann virtually canonized this belief for New Testament scholars (Bultmann 1984). Since then, rationalistic assumptions have greatly influenced the field of New Testament studies. But, this uniformity is by no

means proof that miracles have been invalidated. It is not difficult to find leading philosophers who roundly criticize Hume's work (Taylor 1927, Johnson 1999, Earman 2000).

This section will address aspects of miracles that may affect the Jewish study of Jesus. The resurrection is in a unique category, as it is not claimed to be a miracle that Jesus produced. But, it is nevertheless related to him, and it is the very nature of the supernatural in any form that is usually questioned.

This section begins with a discussion of two pioneering Jewish scholars whose rationalistic assumptions each led to a distinct approach to the historical Jesus. Next, the question of comparative miracles will be addressed. The miracles recorded in the New Testament are not like miraculous found in other traditions. This section will address the works of three Jewish scholars who have studied these claims. Finally, the Exodus from Egypt will be discussed. How Jewish scholars approach the foundational miracle of their own tradition may yield clues about presuppositions regarding the study of the resurrection of Jesus.

3.1.1 Spinoza and Wise

Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza was excommunicated from the synagogue of Amsterdam in 1656, and he is famously considered the first Jew who stopped being a Jew but did not become anything else. He never denied the existence of God. This would probably have been impossible in his day, even for him. But, he did categorically deny the possibility of miracles. For this reason, he is hailed by many skeptics (both Jews and Gentiles) as an important and heroic forerunner. His dogmatic stance went well beyond the skepticism that would emerge a century later in the Enlightenment. One of his modern biographers, Stephen Nadler, wrote: 'For Hume, a miracle is highly unlikely, to the point of incredibility, for Spinoza, "a miracle, either contrary to nature or above nature, is mere absurdity"' (Nadler 2011:91).

Spinoza dealt with miracles in several ways. Based on medieval Kabbalistic thought, he held to a form of pantheism. In this cosmology, God is not separate from His creation but rather indistinguishable from it. For him, 'nature maintains an eternal, fixed and immutable order' (Spinoza 2007:28). This underlying belief fueled much of his thinking about the impossibility of miracles. At other times his beliefs sound much more like those of Maimonides, although somewhat updated by the modern science that was emerging. He often gave numerous and contradictory explanations for specific Biblical miracles. Case in point is his discussions about God causing the sun to stop in the days of Joshua (Harvey 2013:675).

Spinoza did mention the resurrection of Jesus. Since he was already excommunicated from the synagogue, he was able to approach this subject in a way that was not yet possible within traditional Judaism. Because his cosmology already ruled out the possibility of the miraculous, an alternative explanation was needed. This issue fell within his already confusing and scandalous theology that is found in his most famous work, *The theological political treatise*. Yitzhak Melamed, one of today's pre-eminent Spinoza scholars addressed this. He begins by citing the following Spinoza quote.

[T]he chief distinction I make between religion and superstition is that the latter is founded on ignorance, the former on wisdom. And this I believe is the reason why Christians are distinguished from other people not by faith, nor charity, nor the other fruits of the Holy Spirit. But solely by an opinion they hold, namely, because, as they all do, they rest their case on miracles, that is ignorance, which is the source of all wickedness ... and thus they turn their faith, true as it may be, into superstition.

(Spinoza, in Melamed 2012:143)

Spinoza was variously thought of as a heretic, a Christian who wrote to show the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, a liberal Christian (although that term did not exist), and simply an oddity. He accepted some aspects of traditional Christianity, although not the New Testament's explanations and presentations of those issues. Melamed explains.

The crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming are presented by Spinoza as helpful narratives that might promote the education of certain people, but Christianity – the belief in the narratives of the New Testament – stops being the sole or even sufficient condition for salvation and for knowledge of Christ according to the spirit.

(Melamed 2012:147)

For Spinoza, the resurrection was relevant only to the original faithful. Paul came to believe later and believed something different. Paul, Spinoza thought, did not believe in a physical resurrection, but rather boasted that he 'knows Christ not after the flesh, but after the spirit'. The event that the apostles believed, according to Spinoza, can be explained. He cites Abraham who believed he shared a meal with God, and the Israelites who believed that God spoke to them directly. In the same way, such appearances were 'adapted to the understanding and beliefs of those men to whom God wished to reveal his mind by these means' (Spinoza, in Melamed 2012:149). In a later letter, Spinoza acknowledges that he accepted (or could accept) the passion, death, and burial of Jesus literally, while the resurrection must remain allegorical. Melamed offered the following comment.

Spinoza's resort to allegorical interpretation is quite astounding given his scathing critique of Maimonides' own allegorical interpretation of the Bible.... Oddly enough, it seems that when Spinoza had to address the New Testament, he suddenly adopted a Maimonidean approach to the holy writ.

(Melamed 2012:151)

Isaac M. Wise is much less famous than Spinoza, especially among the world at large. But, he was an extremely important pioneer in his own right, as he almost singlehandedly brought Reform Judaism to the United States. In 1874, he wrote *The martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth*. This work serves as a precursor to the later attempts at uncovering the historical Jesus that will be discussed in the following Chapter.

His stated purpose was to examine the New Testament from the 'standpoint of reason'. He claimed complete objectivity, and declared that he 'wears no sectarian shackles, stands under no local bias, and obeys no mandates of any particular school' (Wise 1874:5). His critical assumptions were typical of the day. None of the Gospels, he believed, were written in the first century, and he assigns to Mark the date of 135-138 (Wise 1874:13). The historicity of the Gospels cannot be trusted: 'Simple facts were skillfully wrought up into a divine drama, after the pattern of the Pagan mysteries, in defiance of the plain resultants of reason and the simple teachings of the Bible (Wise 1874:152).

Wise ultimately wanted to demonstrate two things. First, that the Jews did not kill Jesus. Therefore, he denies both the trials before Jewish leaders (where the sentencing would have taken place), and the crucifixion itself (where the death would have taken place). The first of these would occupy the minds of a number of scholars in later years. But the denial of crucifixion itself is a unique position.

The second thing he wanted to counter was the theological meaning behind the crucifixion. The New Testament says that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. Wise believed otherwise. As a product of the Enlightenment, he believed the concept of one dying in the place of another was 'immoral' (Wise 1874:12). Like Spinoza, his worldview assumptions dictated his approach. Yet, the texts still need to be evaluated on their own.

First, Wise discredits the trials before the Jewish leaders by pointing to discrepancies in the texts. Specifically, he argues, the four writers of the Gospels gave incomplete accounts of the arrest and trials. This is enough to question their reliability.

Circumstantial evidence is insufficient. If for instance one has seen a man lying in wait, another has seen him load a pistol, a third has heard the noise of a shot coming from the tree where the man laid in wait, and a fourth sees the victim shot dead; their testimony

would not convict the murderer to subject him to the sentence of death. Each witness must have seen the whole deed.

(Wise 1874:71)

Wise then offers his own explanation of what really happened. Jesus was ‘captured at night as quietly as possible’, brought to an unknown place which was ‘secluded from the eyes of the populace’ and brought to Pilate early in the morning (Wise 1874:125). This would explain how the Jewish trials were avoided. After this, he gives several reasons to prove that the crucifixion never happened. For example, the Talmud refers to Jesus as the ‘hanged one’, not the ‘crucified one’ (Wise 1874:100). In the book of Acts, Peter says that he was hanged on ‘a tree’ (Ac 5:30, 39, 13:29), not a cross. The Roman historian Tacitus does say that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, ‘but he says not what’ (Wise 1874:100).

As to why the crucifixion story was needed (and therefore ‘invented’), ‘It is well known that the cross was the symbol of life and eternity long before the Christian story transpired’. To support this he offers two examples. The first is a fanciful interpretation of Ezekiel 9:4 and 6, and the second is an appeal to pagan sources (Wise 1874: 100).

Wise’s story ends with Jesus being led to Pilate. What happens next is not known. From here, popular theories were advanced. ‘Some said he was crucified; others thought he was hung on a tree; and others again said he did not die at all’ (Wise 1874:126). The crucifixion story is then credited to Paul. He would be the one to embellish the story and mix it with pagan ideas. Because he strongly emphasized the crucifixion (1 Cor 17:23), Wise sees this as ‘proof that the crucifixion was denied by other teachers of the gospel’ (Wise 1874:100). In other words, Paul made a point of emphasizing it specifically to counter previous teachers who were downplaying or negating the idea. But, if these other ‘teachers of the Gospel’ did not believe in the crucifixion, what exactly was the message they were proclaiming? Wise explains: ‘The spiritual resurrection of Jesus, which the original apostles taught, was transferred into a bodily resurrection for the benefit of heathens with gross conceptions of Spirit and God’ (Wise 1874:127).

This thesis would have little if any support among contemporary scholars. Some of his presuppositions are simply outdated. His conclusions are highly speculative and overly dismissive. But, this work is important for another reason. It serves as an object lesson. His approach is quite similar to many of the modern attempts at dismissing the resurrection. It is perhaps easier to recognize the problems of this methodology when the topic is less controversial. The very thing he was claiming to be ahistorical is the one thing that is almost universally acknowledged today. But, when the same approach is employed to discredit the resurrection – a much more controversial topic – some of the same problematic tactics too often go unquestioned.

3.1.2 Comparative miracles

Scholars of the historical Jesus have often strain to find the appropriate category in which to place him. Was he more of an Essene or a Pharisee, a mystic or a prophet? These labels may be helpful, but they may also unnecessarily force him into categories that deny his uniqueness. This is especially true when discussing his miracles. If there were others who allegedly did miraculous deeds, then claims about him would be that much less impressive. Hume took this argument further and declared that the very existence of competing claims cancels out both of them. More recently, Paula Fredriksen made a similar statement. She is firmly convinced that the disciples believed that Jesus rose from the dead. But, in her own studies of Jesus, the possibility that what they believed is what actually happened is beyond consideration for her. She writes: 'Treating supernatural claims as historical data is cheating, unless we are willing to honor all supernatural claims as historical' (Fredriksen 1995:85, see also below).

This argument, whether from Hume or Fredriksen, only has weight in a world where the supernatural is presumed to be false from the start. Most people who believe in the supernatural also acknowledge the possibility that those outside of their own faith tradition may yield supernatural events. This is clearly seen in the Tanakh (Ex 7:11-12), New Testament (Mt 24:24) and the Talmud (*Gittin* 57a). What needs to be addressed is the source of such power, and the meaning behind the events themselves. In the time of Jesus, his detractors sometimes accused him of working miracles through evil power. But they did not deny that he actually produced miracles.

There are three Jewish scholars who have examined the miraculous claims of Jesus in comparison to other contemporary miracle workers. The first is Geza Vermes. For him, Jesus belonged to a general group of wonder workers of the day: 'His roles, that is to say, as healer of the physically ill, exerciser of the possessed, and dispenser of forgiveness to sinners, must be seen in the context to which they belong, namely charismatic Judaism' (Vermes 1973:58).

Vermes compares Jesus, first, with Honi. This famous character was known both as Honi the Circle Drawer in the Talmud, and Onias the Righteous by Josephus. Honi lived in the period just prior to the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE, and he was famous for demanding that God cause rain to fall. Some rabbis thought his attitude was too presumptuous, while others attributed it to his special (father and son-like) relationship with God (Vermes 1973:70).

The other example shares more in common with Jesus. Hanina ben Dosa lived in the mid first century in Galilee, and is described in rabbinic tradition as a man of 'extraordinary devotion and miraculous healing talents' (Vermes 1973:73). He was

renowned for his ability to heal from a distance and announce an immediate cure. The most famous of such cases involved Gamliel's son (*b. Ber.* 43b; Vermes 1973:75). Vermes compares this with Jesus' healing of the Centurion's servant: 'It is of interest to note that both Hanina and Jesus are said to have sensed the efficacy of their cures – Hanina, by means of the fluency of his prayer, and Jesus, who normally came into bodily contact with the sick, by feeling that 'power had gone out of him' (Vermes 1973:75).

Some similarities between Jesus and Hanina do exist. They both were healers and they both lived in poverty in the Galilee in the first century. Building on Vermes' scholarship, Alan J. Avery-Peck wrote an important article on how later rabbinic commentators viewed the achievements of these charismatic miracle workers (other than Jesus). On one hand, rabbinic thought believed that prophecy had ended by their day. They proposed a different model of authority, 'one that rejected the charismatic holy man as a model of community leadership' (Avery-Peck 2006:150). Yet, the rabbis spoke about Honi and Hanina as men of great piety who did miracles. Tales about them appear in the Mishnah, Tosefta and the Babylonian Talmud.

Avery-Peck then discusses the time frame in which this information was documented. By his reckoning, the Mishnah was codified in the early third century. The Tosefta was written a hundred years later (fourth century), and the Babylonian Talmud was completed in the sixth century (Avery-Peck 2006:151). He continues,

The problem is that, even if the materials to be discussed represent what actually was said or done by those individuals, they were collected and redacted many years after those events by people who had their own theological and social agendas...Consequently, we must understand the stories reviewed here about charismatic holy men who lived at the turn of the millennia to reflect more about the attitudes and theologies of the third through the sixth centuries, when the documents in which they are contained were edited, than about these individuals and their own historical periods.

(Avery-Peck 2006:152)

Charismatic miracle workers are attested to in the late Second Temple literature. But, the details given in rabbinic literature, Avery-Peck argues, 'cannot be accepted uncritically as representative of the religious world of Jesus' (Avery-Peck 2006:165). His data may also be used to compare the claims of Jesus' miracles with the claims of others. Most scholars agree that Jesus died in approximately 30 CE. The first Gospel, Mark, was most likely completed by the year 70 CE. It includes a wealth of miraculous claims. The other three Gospels were written later, but even critical scholars place them no later than the end of the first century. Honi is first mentioned in Josephus, although we really get to know about his miracles in the later rabbinic writings. Hanina is first mentioned in the Mishnah.

Avery-Peck's placement of the Mishnah is later than that of most scholars, who usually assign a date of late second century. But, even if we take the latest possible date for the New Testament and the earliest possible date for Josephus and the Mishnah, there is still a significant difference between the two camps. Numerous miracles of Jesus were first recorded within forty years of his life. Honi and Hanina are each mentioned for the first time over one hundred and fifty years after they lived. If all of the relevant documents are included in the discussion, then it becomes a difference between seventy years for the New Testament documents as opposed to over four hundred years for the rabbinic literature (see also Keener 2011:66-82).

It is also important to recognize the type of literature in which these claims appear. Avery-Peck said that the miracle stories in rabbinic literature are meant to 'illustrate the application of a specific law or guiding principle' (Avery-Peck 2006: 151). They are included for the purpose of supporting legal arguments. Throughout the Gospels, miracles occur in a variety of literary genres. As one Christian commentator noted, this includes 'biographical sayings, parables, a dispute story, sayings of instruction and commissionings, as well as the stories of exorcism, healing, raising the dead and the so-called nature miracles' (Twelftree 1999:256).

One other scholar who compared Jesus to contemporary miracle workers is Michael Mach of Tel Aviv University. His article discussed the differences between miracle workers and magicians. The Gospels present Jesus differently than the other miracle workers of the day. He was self-sufficient, while the magicians of the ancient world usually had some type of external help.

(W)e find Jesus in some cases as exorcist and in others as healer, but not as calling for the help of demons. Only the Beelzebub controversy has it differently. But here the opponents claim that Jesus is helped by the demons or their leader. It is never his own claim.

(Mach 2005: 191)

Mach also compares the miracles of Jesus with the rabbinic material. Examples such as walking on water, feeding the masses and changing water to wine may have parallels with stories about some of the famous rabbis. But, the ultimate meaning and purpose of the Gospel stories leads in a different direction: 'To some degree these stories remind us of rabbinical narratives about the sages – with the unmarked difference, that here we have a specific notion of Jesus at the center of events' (Mach 2005:199).

Mach does not attempt to find the historical Jesus. His working assumption is that the Gospel authors created the information according to their own needs. But, his ultimate findings about the texts help the discussion about the uniqueness of the earliest picture

of Jesus. 'Whatever the historical Jesus did,' he wrote, 'the theological Jesus was the Son of God; he hardly needed to invoke other deities and demons for his healings and exorcisms' (Mach 2005:201).

These points about attestation, in themselves, do not prove or disprove the miracles in question. Regarding the difference between the New Testament claims and the rabbinic claims there are three basic possibilities. Either they are both false, both true, or one is true while the other is false (a fourth possibility is that within each tradition some are true and some are false). Further information is needed to make such a determination. But, the radical difference in the claims themselves should not go unnoticed. This demolishes the suggestion that all claims are equal, and therefore cancel each other out. Not only is it not 'cheating' to investigate the miracles of Jesus, the evidence demands it.

3.1.3 The exodus

Apart from the act of creation itself, the great miracle in the Tanakh is God's delivering the children of Israel from Egypt. It has both theological and historical significance. It is mentioned throughout the pages of the Hebrew Bible some one hundred and twenty times (Zakovich 1991:9). It is the prime example of God's power and His character, the reason why He should be trusted and worshipped. The Ten Commandments begin with a reference to this event. In Exodus 20:2, God introduces Himself as the one who 'brought you out of the land of Egypt'. This is the reason, the next verse explains, that the Israelites were instructed to 'have no other god before me'. As the Jewish Study Bible explains: 'This is a central doctrine of biblical religion, which is based on the historical experience of the Israelites' (Berlin Brettler 2004:148).

The exodus is equally important in the New Testament. Moses is presumed to be a historical figure, and the life of Jesus is said to fulfill his writings (Mat 5:17-19, Lu 24:44, Jn 5:46). The wilderness wandering is likewise treated as real history (Jn 3:14, 6:31). However, some Jewish and Christian scholars have questioned the Exodus since the rise of modernity. Some deny the supernatural elements such as the parting of the sea, and offer humanistic explanations of what really happened. Another approach has been to categorize the Exodus as a myth, rather than literal history. This does not mean the event never happened. Rather, the story's primary goal may be to communicate, for example, the evolution toward monotheism among the ancient Israelites. Samuel Loewenstamm wrote,

At the beginning of this evolutionary process there may have stood an actual historical event. Even so, it remains an open question whether those sources which tell of the event in a manner stressing its historical nature are in fact directly based on the event itself or

whether they drew on a mythological tradition which had long ago discarded its ancient form.

(Loewenstamm 1992:292)

Other scholars are more dogmatic in their denial of the exodus. Critical theories abound in the world of archaeology. Theories range from a flat out denial that there were any 'children of Israel' at all in Egypt, to a less dogmatic stance which says that the event was much more limited than the Bible's description (Finkelstein & Mazar 2013). The growing number of liberal and atheist Jews are more than happy to accept such scholarship. This has implications for the study of the resurrection of Jesus. 'If our traditions have difficulty deciding how to define or evaluate the miraculous claims in our own faiths', Micahel Kogan asked, 'how then are we to evaluate the miracle stories of the other's narrative?' (Kogan 2008).

The scholarship that denies the exodus is by no means as air-tight as some would suggest. There are Christian (Hoffmeir 1999) and Jewish (Brenner 2008) scholars who offer evidence for the historicity of the event. Really, the main argument against the exodus event is the lack of positive evidence. Ultimately, it is an argument from silence. Richard Elliott Friedman believes that the purely negative conclusion is unwarranted. He argues that there is both textual and archaeological evidence. Also, as an anecdote for why evidence has not been found, he relates that 'a vehicle that had been lost in the 1973 Yom Kippur War was recently uncovered under 16 meters – that's 52 feet – of sand. Fifty-two feet in 40 years!' (Friedman 2014). Lawrence Schiffman also provided evidence and at the end of his article wrote the following.

It is a simple matter to claim that lack of clear, decisive external confirmation of the biblical account is itself a disproof, but no rational person believes that what has not been proven is false. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that there is no consensus that the Exodus is a myth.

(Schiffman 2009)

On the other end of the spectrum, those who do believe in the exodus account may employ a very different argument for not investigating the resurrection of Jesus. It is an argument that is traced back to Judah Halevi's classic work, *The Kuzari*. This twelfth century book promotes the rationalism and superiority of Judaism, over and against that of Christianity and Islam. It is written in the form of a dialogue, as the main character, 'rabbi', presents his case to the King of the Kuzars. The fact that the Exodus was experienced and witnessed by the entire community (over 600,000 people), leads to its authentication and truthfulness, an argument that greatly impresses the King.

David Klinghoffer put a more pointed, and modern spin on this argument in his bestselling book, *Why the Jews rejected Jesus*. 'If it was God's habit to seek mass

witness to His greatest deeds, as the Sinai event suggests’, he wrote, ‘then why not here with Jesus’ resurrection’ (Klinghoffer 2005:88)? This argument assumes that God works within a certain pattern. If true, it would mean that the resurrection of Jesus falls outside of this pattern, and therefore is not a true miracle of God. But, it is curious that Klinghoffer uses the word ‘habit’ for a model that has only one occurrence. Throughout the Tanakh God worked in a variety of ways and – as will be seen in a moment – the ‘mass witness’ was actually the exception rather than the rule.

Pinchas Lapidé was aware of this argument as well. Specifically, he was responding to some of the early pagan philosophers who condemned the resurrection because the event was not witnessed by a group. Lapidé’s response works equally well for those who compare the Exodus with the resurrection of Jesus. God often revealed Himself supernaturally to just one person or a limited few (Lapidé cites Dn 10:7). The relatively small audience of the resurrection is in keeping with the Biblical record. Faith is always a necessary ingredient, and Jewish readers, he says, should understand this.

Thus the Eternal One appeared only to Abraham; Jacob is alone when he struggles with the angel of the Lord, nobody but Moses sees the burning bush, and Elijah – in complete loneliness – hears the voice of God neither in “a great and strong wind which rent the mountains...nor in any earthquake...nor in the fire...but in a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11ff).

(Lapidé 1983:120)

3.1.4 Conclusion

This Section has not attempted to prove the existence of miracles. Great thinkers from Maimonides to Mendelsohn have attempted to understand and define them, and the discussion has continued in the Jewish world ever since (see Cohn-Sherbok 1983; Radowsky 1989; Zakovich 1990; Isaacs 1997). Questions range from the purpose of miracles, to the nature of the cosmos. Spinoza categorically denied the possibility, although the Big Bang theory pretty much refutes his pantheistic assumptions. There remains no definitive argument that rules out the miraculous, despite popular presuppositions to the contrary.

The resurrection of Jesus needs to be discussed on its own merit. Historical evidence for it and against it must be weighed. The argument is sometimes made, again stemming from Hume, that extraordinary events need extraordinary evidence. But, it must be remembered that even what is commonly agreed upon about Jesus is already extraordinary. The very fact that we are still discussing this Jewish man who died on a cross two thousand years ago alludes to this. The fact that the whole world marks history as having happened prior to or since his coming is clearly beyond the ordinary.

The miraculous claims about Jesus are unique. Geza Vermes acknowledged this in his study of ancient miracle workers. In the same book he also discussed Jesus as a teacher, prophet, messiah and 'the son of man'. Jesus is unique within each category, and unique again in that he is the only one who could even be discussed in all of these categories. In the book's concluding remarks he wrote,

The discovery of the resemblances between the work and words of Jesus and those of the Hasidim, Honi and Hanina ben Dosa, is however by no means intended to imply that he was simply one of them and nothing more ... no objective and enlightened student of the Gospels can help but be struck by the incomparable superiority of Jesus.

(Vermes 1973:224)

3.2 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

For about the last two centuries, the working assumption about the historical Jesus has been that he is different from the Jesus presented in the New Testament. This came about at least partly because of the rising skepticism about supernatural claims (which greatly effected study of the Old Testament as well). The authenticity and accuracy of the texts also became a point of debate. Since the early nineteenth century, many have attempted to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus. In other words, explain 'what *really* happened'. There have been three major quests and a countless number of new approaches and suggestions.

Textual discrepancies are not infrequently cited as a reason to dismiss the historicity. This is especially true when discussing the resurrection. It is commonly known that the resurrection narratives contain the most variants in the Gospels. There has subsequently been an even greater disparity of alternative suggestions by critical scholars, which makes the issue that much more complex. Dan Cohn-Sherbok wrote: 'It is well known that there is no universality of agreement, and if scholars cannot concur about such historical matters what credence can we give to the gospel accounts of the miraculous reappearance of Jesus to his disciples' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:197)?

But, this response may be premature. The study of the historical Jesus has been greatly enhanced by the understanding of the context of late Second Temple Judaism. Unfortunately, the same consideration of the texts themselves is often lacking. Indeed, the medium as well as the message must be analyzed. This Section will survey Jewish scholarship on the texts of the New Testament documents themselves. The first part will explore the Gospels and demonstrate two things; they should not be discarded so quickly, and even the most skeptical approach provides evidence relevant for the discussion of the resurrection. The second part will do the same for Paul's epistles and

Acts. Finally, the third Section will assess criteria that may be helpful in corroborating the New Testament's accounts.

3.2.1 The Gospels

It has been a widespread notion among critical scholars that little if anything about the life of Jesus can be known for certain. But, this is a gross exaggeration, even for the most skeptical scholars. What is usually meant is that very little – apart from what is commonly accepted – can be known for certain. In truth, there are a number of events recorded in the Gospels that even the most skeptical historians readily accept. Amy-Jill Levine provides a helpful summary of the general consensus.

Most scholars agree that Jesus was baptized by John, debated with fellow Jews on how best to live according to God's will, engaged in healings and exorcisms, taught in parables, gathered male and female followers in Galilee, went to Jerusalem, and was crucified by Roman soldiers during the governorship of Pontius Pilate (26-36 CE).

(Levine 2006:4)

What happened in the days following the crucifixion remains debated. One of the reasons for such skepticism is the accusation that the Gospels were produced too late to be historically accurate. They were written one or two generations after the events they record. This charge is more likely to come from popular authors, as trained historians are much less fazed by this. Most ancient literature conforms to this pattern. The biographies of Alexander the Great were written three hundred years after his death and are generally considered reliable. Acknowledging this, Paula Fredriksen observed that 'forty to seventy years' by comparison is 'not bad at all' (Fredriksen 2000:19).

A bigger issue, however, concerns the discrepancies within the texts themselves. For some, this factor negates even the possibility of knowing anything for certain. But, this too must be evaluated in context. Joseph Klausner recognized this, to some extent, about a hundred years ago. 'If we had ancient sources like those in the Gospels for the history of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar', he said, 'we should not cast any doubt on them whatsoever'. He continued,

The same vision and event, when described by two writers differing in temperament and talents, even in our generation will necessarily be portrayed quite differently; in ancient times, when scholarly exactness was not customary at all, would it not be the case all the more?

(Klausner 1927:224)

This should not be taken to mean that ancient standards were sloppy or disinterested in communicating what actually happened. The more that is learned about ancient genres of literature and the means of textual transmission, the more it is understood that it was a quite sophisticated process. This has been a topic of increasing interest among both Christian (Alexander 1991; Girhardson 1998; BurrIDGE 2004; Keener 2009) and Jewish (Schiffman 1991; Neusner 1998a; Elman & Gershoni 2000) scholars.

Martin Jaffe has written extensively about ancient Jewish textual transmission. He observes that communication usually began orally, and was then passed along as a dramatic performance before being committed to writing. The scribes then added their own nuances. This was all part of the same accepted process. The modern notion of expecting the equivalent of a Xerox copy was simply unknown. The route that the information took to reach its canonical form was guaranteed to end in a finished product that would be perplexing to modern exegetes. Jaffe (2001:18-19) said that

a given book normally circulated in a variety of textual forms, some longer and some shorter, one copy distinct in a variety of ways from any other. The line between the authorial creator of a book, its scribal copyists, and its interpretive audience was a rather blurry one and was often crossed in ways no longer retrievable by literary criticism of the surviving texts.

He continued,

Yet the substantial evidence of textual variations suggests the presence of a tacit scribal assumption that a faithful copy might well include interpretive material that clarified the author's thought in addition to the author's actual words. The scribe's judgment about what the author had meant, in other words, was legitimately included in the record of what, according to the manuscript tradition, he had said.

(Jaffe 2001:18-19)

This may be especially relevant for the study of the Gospels, where there are four perspectives on the same basic story. It does not mean that all textual variations become irrelevant. They must still be analyzed. But, an understanding of such norms will at least guard against sweeping negative assumptions that all too often accompany New Testament scholarship. Rather than ascribing ulterior motives or ignorance to the authors, there are other possibilities based on an understanding of ancient means of communication.

The study of the resurrection of Jesus does not hinge upon whether or not the New Testament documents conform to modern standards, or even whether they are free from discrepancies. The details of the texts are by no means unimportant. But, many critical scholars also find countless discrepancies surrounding the crucifixion, an event

that virtually all would affirm as historical. Likewise, discrepancies in the details should not be a reason to abandon the quest for the resurrection. This was the conclusion reached by the two Jewish scholars who investigated the event most extensively.

Pinchas Lapide was well aware of textual variants. He understood the negative conclusions made by scholars, but he also saw beyond the traditional accusations.

No wonder then that the evangelists' contradictory reports on the resurrection have not been able to convince the skeptics, that agnostics write off all narratives as fairy tales of the nursery, and that the purely historical result for sober scientists is extremely meager. However, legends can also be bearers of truths, which by no means deprive the kernel of the narrative of its historicity, as any scholar of religion will bear out.

(Lapide 1983:93)

Specifically, the New Testament needs to be seen as Jewish literature. Lapide then compared the Gospels with the Tanakh, Midrashic literature and the Targums to illustrate his point. Whatever obstacles may be present, there also exists a redeemable historical core. 'Under all the multiple layers of narrative embellishments and the fiction of later generations,' he wrote 'the Jewish New Testament scholar finds such traces of authentic Jewish experience' (Lapide 1983:95).

The actual event of the resurrection is not in question for Lapide. In fact, he finds evidence of authenticity and spends the rest of his book explaining why he believes it happened. Whatever parts may have been 'embellished', the resurrection itself is, for him, not among them. For one thing, there was a casualness that belies tampering. Unlike apocryphal literature that accentuated the supernatural elements, the Gospels seem to go out of their way to make the resurrection a non-spectacular event: 'Instead of an exciting Easter jubilation we here repeatedly of doubts, disbelief, hesitation, and such simple things as linen cloth and the napkins in the empty tomb.... It sounds almost as if any jubilant outburst should be dampened, more covered than uncovered, and as if the truth of the event needed no emphasis' (Lapide 1983:100).

Geza Vermes also interacted with the textual issues. He too was well aware of the challenges. At first, he offers the following statement.

The uncertainties concern the sequence of events, the identity of the informants and witnesses, the number and location of the apparitions of Jesus, the presentation of prophecies relating to the resurrection and finally the date of Jesus' purported departure from earth. The discrepancies among the various accounts regarding both details and substance cannot have escaped the eyes of the attentive readers.

(Vermes 2008:106)

One of Vermes' chief concerns is that each story 'contains unique elements missing from the other Gospels' (Vermes 2008:107). This means that each author chose to incorporate specific material, some of which overlapped with the others and some did not. But, additional information does not in itself mean conflicting information. A more serious accusation is that there are 'flat contradictions between the sources' (Vermes 2008:109). Here he includes the differing number of women who visited the tomb and the fact that the apostolic mission is conferred on the disciples in Jerusalem according to Mark, Luke and John. Matthew places this in the Galilee (Vermes 2008:111).

Vermes, however, ultimately acknowledges that quite a bit of the resurrection narratives are historical, in spite of questions about the details. In fact, some of the discrepancies themselves are used as evidence to this end. The differing number of witnesses at the tomb is one example. 'Yet it is clearly an early tradition. If the empty tomb story had been manufactured by the primitive Church to demonstrate the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, one would have expected a uniform and foolproof account attributed to patently reliable witnesses' (Vermes 2008:142).

Before leaving the Gospels, the question of 'embellishments' must be addressed further. It is almost universally agreed that Mark was the first Gospel to be written, and that Matthew and Luke are based on Mark (and another source, called Q). Unique material found in Matthew or Luke is often considered suspect from the start. This is usually based on two presuppositions that are rampant in critical scholarship and specifically relevant for the study of the resurrection.

The first presupposition, simply, is that the resurrection did not happen. Therefore, any 'embellishments' must by definition be fabrications. The second presupposition is that these later authors had no other sources, and therefore unique information must have come from their own imaginations. Two events in Matthew, specifically, illustrate this discussion.

The first is the story of the guard at the tomb who was told to say that the Jews stole the body (Mt 27:62-66). It is commonly assumed to be 'unlikely' (Gale 2012:54) at best. But, again, this is usually based on the assumption that there was no resurrection. Legitimate concerns may be raised about this passage, and a number of answers have been given (Craig 1984; France 2007:1091-1095). But, ultimately, it is a peripheral issue in the discussion of the historicity of the resurrection itself. The same may be said for the even more controversial passage in Matthew, where the tombs of the dead were opened and the dead were raised (Mt 28:52). Vermes offered the following:

Matthew's account is best understood as symbolic and suggests that an anticipatory resurrection, the disgorging of the raised 'saints' (i.e. righteous) by the gaping tombs, happened immediately after Jesus had expired. Yet the saints are said to have appeared to 'many', not on Friday, but early on Sunday. Therefore the religious message hints at a link between the death and consequent resurrection of Jesus and the general raising of the dead.

(Vermes 2008:92)

3.2.2 Paul's letters and Acts

The apostle Paul has been just as much a lightning rod for controversy as Jesus. The books of the New Testament that bear his name are famously divided into those which are considered authentic and those that are not. His letters are hotly debated as being either pagan or Jewish, and the portrait of his life as preserved in the Book of Acts is often summarily dismissed as erratic at best. Yet, here too, a bare bones outline of his life may be constructed. Mark Nanos wrote,

At some point after the early Jesus-following subgroups became active, Paul (who had opposed these groups) had a change of heart about their merit following an experience while traveling toward Damascus to seek to stop these Jews from continuing on their course.

(Nanos 2011:551)

The question of dating is less of a problem here. Paul's most important writing about the resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15. This chapter is dated sometime in the early or mid-fifties, and no one denies that it is genuinely Pauline. This pushes back the attestation of the resurrection to within twenty-five years of the crucifixion. But, there is also evidence that may push it back even further. Many scholars see the *kerygma* of 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 as an early hymn of faith, which probably originated within a few years of the crucifixion.

For Alan F. Segal, this is the earliest Christian teaching. It is 'part of the primitive *kerygma* or proclamation of the early church' (Segal 2004:424 emphasis in the original). Levenson and Madigan said it was a 'well-established tradition' (Madigan & Levenson 2008:25). 'In all probability', they continued, 'this gospel was already proclaimed during the decade in which Jesus died, some twenty years or so before Paul sent his letter to the Corinthians around 55 C.E.' (Madigan & Levenson 2008:25). Pinchas Lapide offered eight reasons why he believed this section is an early hymn. They include the following.

1. the wording is un-Pauline
2. the parallels of the wording are "biblically formulated"
3. the threefold "and that" characterizes Aramaic/Mishnaic Hebrew
4. the passive phrase "being raised" is reminiscent of Jewish construction, so as not to mention the name of God
5. the use of the Aramaic name Cephas

6. the double reference to 'in accordance with the scriptures'
7. the term 'the twelve' refers to a closed group of the original witnesses
8. the inclusion of the four events revealed for salvation which appear in all later reports: died for our sins, buried, raised, appeared.

(Lapide 1983:98-9)

Whatever one concludes about the dating of this passage, virtually all scholars acknowledge that the original disciples believed in the resurrection. As will be seen repeatedly in Chapter 4, this view enjoys acceptance on virtually the same level as the crucifixion itself. This brings us to Acts, where the dating is much more debated. Claudia Setzer said, 'Majority opinion places composition of Acts in the 80s and 90s, though a tremendous range of variation persists' (Setzer 1994: 44).

Like the Gospels, Acts receives mixed reviews among critical scholars. One of the common accusations concerns the difference in the way Paul is described in Acts as compared with Paul's own letters. Samuel Sandmel said the two pictures are as different as 'the Jew of the East European ghetto is to the American-born Jew' (Sandmel 1958:16). Pamela Eisenbaum said that Acts' description of Paul 'differs markedly' from the epistles (Eisenbaum 2009:12). Specifically, she cites the frequently made accusation that Acts make no mention of Paul's letters. But this, she responds, may be quite understandable for a few reasons. Namely, these works are written by two different authors, writing different genres, and for a different purpose (Eisenbaum 2009:12). Acts, she explains, conforms to ancient rather than modern standards of history. But, this does not mean it is irrelevant for study.

On the contrary, Acts constitutes an undeniable part of the historical record that can be mined for information about the origins of Christianity generally, as well as some of its central figures like Paul, as long as it is used with awareness of its literary tendencies and particular bias. (This is true of ancient and modern accounts of events.)

(Eisenbaum 2009:15)

Paula Fredriksen also affirms the historicity of the basic narrative of Acts. She acknowledges that the new movement went quickly beyond Jerusalem and established congregations in Judea, Samaria and Galilee, Bethany in Judea, Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, Damascus and Antioch. 'Within just five years of Jesus' death' she writes, 'evidence abounds of this new movement's wide and rapid dissemination' (Fredriksen 2000, 236). She offered neither an explicit endorsement nor a condemnation of Acts, but her view of the historical situation corresponds with the narrative.

Regarding discrepancies, most relevant to this study are the three accounts of Paul meeting the risen Jesus (Ac 9:3-8, 22:6-11, 26:12-18). They disagree on secondary

details (Hedrick 1981). The modern historian must decide what to do with this, and how relevant these details actually are. The event in question is a supernatural event, and specifically one with profound implications. Because of this, it is especially problematic to the modern exegete and raises some important questions. Namely, would these types of variations be as serious if they appeared in a different (non-supernatural) context? The fact that the three accounts appear within the same book, and that no future editors attempted to 'correct' them, should also be taken into consideration.

But, even if these three accounts in Acts are dismissed as one complete fabrication, most scholars nevertheless believe that Paul persecuted the early followers and that he came to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Many would attribute this to his belief that he encountered the risen Jesus. These points are stated in Paul's letters (Gl 1:13; 1 Cor 15:8), and it is the rare scholar who denies both the testimony of Paul's 'authentic' letters and the testimony of Acts. Theories about what may have 'really' happened will be discussed below in Chapter 4. But, the fact that Paul himself believed he had encountered the risen Jesus is usually considered to be authentic.

3.2.3 Further criteria

The most prominent approach to the New Testament in the twentieth century was the Form Criticism championed by Rudolph Bultmann. This approach assumes that much of the Gospel material was created by the final redactors, rather than by earlier, original sources. Advocates of this approach spend much of their time attempting to decipher which material is more likely original, as opposed to that which was created by and for the early church based on their own needs.

The pioneers of the Jewish study of Jesus began as outsiders to both the faith, as well as the formal study of, the New Testament. Extreme Form Criticism, the dominant model, was usually assumed to be *the* scholarly approach (Sandmel 1956). But, more recently, as Jewish scholars have become increasingly conversant in New Testament studies, more nuanced explanations are being developed. To assign 'every bit of material to the compositional level', Setzer wrote, 'seems overly skeptical about the process of transmission' (Setzer 1994). Similarly, Doron Mendels of Hebrew University wrote the following.

As a historian of antiquity (not only of Jewish and early Christian history) I can say that many of the traditions found in the narrative parts of the New Testament go back to the 30s and 40s of the first century CE, while some reflect an awareness of what these years meant in the communities some years later.

(Mendels 1998:440-441)

Another take on the subject comes from Herbert Basser in his book, *The mind behind the gospels*. He focuses on Matthew and sees two ‘minds’ (or streams of thought) throughout the book. The earlier stream is very Jewish, and corresponds to later rabbinic literature in style and content. Another, anti-Jewish, level was added to Matthew at the time of the book’s final editing. Basser believes that by the time of the destruction of the Temple the ways had already parted, and the followers of Jesus were already in a bitter rivalry with the traditional Jewish community. The earlier material is extremely Jewish, the complexities of which ‘Matthew did not understand’ (Basser 1998:xi). The remaining material represents ‘the mind of later preachers who needed to drive a wedge between the two communities’ (Basser 1998:4).

Critical scholarship may be used to discredit the canonical picture presented in the Gospels. It may also be used to affirm its content, or at least argue against skeptical reconstructions. Two examples will be given here. The question of the empty tomb has been ardently debated. In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, the discussion usually revolved around why it was empty in the first place. More recently, the accusation that Jesus was never placed in a tomb at all has become quite popular, which of course would preclude the previous question. Two Jewish scholars have offered evidence in response to these accusations, although they (presumably) were not attempting to make a case for the resurrection.

The criterion of embarrassment, as it is called, may be an important tool to determine authenticity. This is especially relevant in the discussion of the women who find the empty tomb. In one article, Claudia Setzer focused on the role of women – specifically Mary Magdalene – in the Gospels and particularly in resurrection narratives. The first part demonstrates how the evangelists downplay the role of women in their respective Gospels. In the second part, she compares this phenomenon with other discussions about the resurrection that exist in early Church history. There are two overarching factors in her study: ‘Women’s presence and testimony as witnesses to the empty tomb and Jesus’ appearance after death seems an early and firmly entrenched piece of the tradition. Equally early and entrenched is the embarrassment around that fact’ (Setzer 1997:259).

The women’s witness of the empty tomb is ‘indispensable’ to the story (Setzer 1997:259). Mary Magdalene was the first to discover the empty tomb, the first (in Matthew and John) to see the risen Jesus, and she also witnessed the death and burial. This is important for apologetics purposes, as it ‘provides a continuous witness to counter those who might argue that followers were confused about which tomb was Jesus’ (Setzer 1997:261). The prominent role of the women could not be abandoned,

even as the authors were attempting to ‘mute the women’s role and discredit their witness’ (Setzer 1997:264).

The ‘muting’ was done in various ways. For example, Mark 15:41 specifically refers to the women as ‘habitual followers of Jesus’. Matthew’s account (Mt 27:55-56) changes the form of the verb, describing ‘the simple physical act of following at a certain point in time, thus diluting the sense of continuing discipleship’ (Setzer 1997:264).

Even within each Gospel, Setzer sees a difference between the way the women are portrayed in the resurrection narratives and how they appear earlier in the same Gospel. Mark has a ‘relatively positive view of women’s discipleship’, although the women ‘do not shine’ in the resurrection accounts. This is demonstrated in Mark 16:8, when they ‘flee in fear and astonishment’. This is contrasted with the men, who forsake Jesus before his death, while the women do so after his death. Matthew, conversely, shows ‘indifference to the idea of women as disciples’, however they ‘fare better’ in his resurrection account than in Mark’s (Setzer 1997:266). Luke, Setzer writes, ‘is mixed in his depiction of women’. They appear quite faithful throughout, yet ‘in spite of their faithfulness, Jesus does not appear to them as he does in Matthew’ (Setzer 1997:266-67). John presents ‘the most dignified picture of women’, although they are ‘never clearly identified as disciples’ (Setzer 1997:268). These and other examples lead to her conclusion, that certain elements of the story were ‘deeply embedded at an early, even pre-Gospel stage, and later Gospel authors or the traditions they received were not entirely at ease with these elements, producing an uneven “fit”’ (Setzer 1997:268).

The second part of the article addresses how the resurrection narratives were portrayed. Along with two passages from the New Testament, she includes sources from early Church history, such as the Gospel of Peter, Justin Martyr and Celsus. Over time, the role of the women was not only downplayed but in some cases specifically denied. In the Gospel of Peter, for example, the women refuse to look at the empty tomb, run away afraid, and only men are witnesses of the resurrection (Setzer 1997:269). Justin does not mention the women (although he does not specifically deny their involvement). Celsus attributes to Jews an argument that denied the resurrection because the witness was ‘a hysterical female’ (Setzer 1997:270).

These later works provide more blatant examples of muting. However, they may be behind the ‘curious reserve about women’s witness’ in the New Testament as well (Setzer 1997:271). The first example comes from Matthew 28:11-15, the rumor about the stolen body. While she believes the historicity of this event is ‘doubtful’, it is ‘probable’ that there would be a response to the claim of a resurrection. Setzer offers this commentary: ‘Matthew’s response to the charge that the resurrection is fraudulent

(sic) involves no stirring defense of the credibility of Mary Magdalene and the women, but simply puts the source of the rumor of fraud in the mouths of the Jewish leaders' (Setzer 1997:269).

Matthew already described Mary Magdalene's important role earlier in the very same chapter (Mt 28:1-8). That it was not mentioned again in this pericope does not seem to be an example of muting the role of women. Setzer is not claiming that it definitely is, but is merely exploring the possibility based on the more overt examples in Church history.

Her treatment of John 20:15 raises the same question. Here, Mary mistakes Jesus for a gardener and learns that the tomb is empty (and that the gardener is Jesus). The disciples, she says, do not believe her report and only 'rejoice to see him' when Jesus shows his hands and side (Setzer 1997:270). This argument, however, ignores the fact that in the preceding verses Peter (no less) and 'the other disciple' *did* believe Mary's claim and went to see the tomb. The fact that Thomas (and perhaps others) did not immediately come to faith based on Mary's testimony is most likely not a reflection on the gender of the messenger.

Whether or not these last two examples contain evidence of 'muting' the role of women, Setzer is certainly correct that there was an element of embarrassment about their involvement in the early Church. Christian apologists have used this line of reasoning to establish the historicity of the empty tomb. The women's involvement was certainly not something that would have been invented. More than a few have stated that a woman's testimony was not even admissible in a court of law. Setzer questions the value of this argument, since the situation at hand was not a legal context. Also, citing Judith Romney Wegner, she states that 'in later rabbinic law, women's witness was valid in some contexts' (Setzer 1997:261, see also Wegner 1988). But, these are the exceptions that prove the rule. The embarrassment factor is very real, as Setzer confirms. Attempts to dismiss the empty tomb as a fabrication will need to justify this.

The actual burial of Jesus has also been called into question in the last few decades. Jodi Magness, professor of Archaeology at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has studied burial traditions in the late Second Temple Period. She found that, despite popular cries to the contrary, the New Testament's presentation of Joseph of Arimathea and the burial of Jesus do not conflict with the archaeological evidence.

Rock cut-tombs were owned by wealthier members of society, while the poor were buried in 'simple individual trench graves dug into the ground'. Ossuaries were used for the collected bones of earlier burials and belonged to families (Magness 2005:121). A

point of debate has been whether victims of crucifixion would have been theoretically entitled to a proper burial in an ossuary. Some have categorically said no, since that type of death was considered a curse. This, of course, creates a challenge to the canonical picture. But, Magness argues that this was not the case.

For one thing, Jesus was condemned for crimes against Rome, not Jewish law (Magness 2005:141). In the Tanakh, criminals could be hanged for the purpose of public display 'only after they were already dead' (Magness 2005:142). The Sanhedrin did exclude those who were executed for violating Jewish law from being buried in family tombs (*m. Sanh* 6:5). However, the Mishnah 'attaches no stigma to crucifixion by the Roman authorities and does not prohibit victims of crucifixion from being buried with their families' (Magness 2005:143). Evidence for this was found in the discovery of the remains of a crucified man named Yochanon in an ossuary. But, this evidence has been used for both sides of the debate.

Some scholars, notably Jon Dominic Crossan, thought the discovery of Yochanon's remains was an oddity. He argued that given the thousands of crucifixions that we know took place, finding evidence for only one who was buried in a family tomb was simply insufficient. Magness disagreed. In fact, she argued, 'the exact opposite is the case' (Magness 2005:144). The fact that there is any evidence at all is important, and she provides several reasons. First, there are no undisturbed tombs from that period that have been excavated by archaeologists. Second, those who did have rock cut tombs were the Jerusalem elite, those who sought to keep the status quo with the Romans. For this reason, relatively few of them would have undergone crucifixion. Most of the victims of crucifixion belonged to the lower classes, those who would not have owned tombs. Third, after the Romans removed bodies from a cross, there was usually no evidence of the means of death. In the case of Yochanon, a nail in his heel bone demonstrated that he had been crucified. But, according to several scholars, there were factors that made this a fluke. For example, the olive wood found on the tip of the nail had a knot that made it uniquely difficult to remove the nail. Normally, there would have been no such trace (Magness 2005:144-145).

Virtually all scholars agree that Jesus came from a family of modest means and could not afford a rock-cut tomb. If Joseph had not provided a tomb, Magness continues, Jesus likely would have been disposed of in the manner of the poorer classes: in an 'individual trench grave dug into the ground' (Magness 2005:145). Joseph, as described in the gospels, would have had such a tomb. Also, the gospel accounts include an accurate description of Jesus' body being wrapped in a linen shroud. She concludes: 'This understanding of the Gospel accounts removes at least some of the grounds for

arguments that Joseph of Arimathea was *not* a follower of Jesus, or that he was a completely fictional character (although, of course, it does not prove that Joseph existed or that this episode occurred)' (Magnes 2005:148).

This is an important admission. Magnes is certainly correct that the details cannot be proven. Saying that it is possible is not the same as verifying that it happened. All will agree on this. But, given the fact that the burial story appears in all four gospels, that the kerygma provides early attestation to the burial, and that, as Setzer has demonstrated, the empty tomb tradition is unshakably early, then the burden of proof lies on those who question the canonical account.

3.2.4 Conclusion

For over two hundred years, scholars have been approaching the New Testament from every conceivable angle. Theories have come and gone, and occasionally get 'resurrected' with new packaging for a later generation. But, the sheer volume of accusations does not, in itself, constitute an argument against the texts. The indictments are often contradictory and self-incriminating, and no critical alternative has gained anything close to a consensus.

The canonical New Testament – warts and all – remains standing while the alternative theories fall to the ground. Most scholars accept the historicity of the basic events in the Gospels, and even Acts, despite common assertions to the contrary. Textual issues, whether called variants, discrepancies or contradictions do present a challenge. But, not an insurmountable one, especially compared with studies of other ancient manuscripts. Validation of the narrative is also possible, as seen above in the works by Setzer and Magnes.

Lapide and Vermes recognized the problems, but saw beyond them. By acknowledging the contours of ancient (and specifically Jewish) literature, they proceeded with their investigations. Many of the passages may be harmonized, while others remain perplexing. But, by recognizing the generally accepted historical events, and by admitting that there may be at least a historical kernel in the narrative, the texts themselves do not need to remain a stumbling block. There is enough information to form a cogent case. In fact, from a purely historical perspective, the resurrection is as documented as the crucifixion. Alfred Edersheim noticed this over a hundred and thirty years ago.

For – to take the historical view of the question – even if every concession were made to negative criticism, sufficient would still be left in the Christian documents to establish a

consensus of the earliest belief as to all the great facts of the Gospel-History, on which the preaching of the Apostles and the primitive Church have been historically based.

(Edersheim 1993:xiv, emphasis in the original)

3.3 THE NEW TESTAMENT'S TREATMENT OF JEWS AND JUDAISM

The history of Christianity is littered with anti-Jewish deeds and polemics. The question in this Section concerns the relationship between the New Testament documents themselves and the later interpretations and actions of the Church regarding the Jewish people. Technically speaking, the term 'anti-Semitism' is anachronistic when discussing the New Testament, since it is a concept that began in the nineteenth century. Some therefore prefer the term 'anti-Jewish' when discussing Jews as a people in the New Testament, while 'anti-Judaism' refers to the religious expression (of either some or all Jews). The terms, as will be seen, are often used interchangeably.

The way the Gospels portray Jews and Judaism has been the subject of much discussion. There is a wide range of opinions among non-Jewish scholars. One extreme sees anti-Jewish themes as dominating the narrative, being the very reason why some of the most foundational themes and events were 'created' by the evangelists. For Rosemary Reuther (1974) this means Christology itself, while for John Dominic Crossan (1996) it includes the passion narratives. On the other end of the discussion are conservative Christian commentators. Craig Evans and Donald Hagner edited a book that includes articles by over a dozen scholars, all of whom agree that 'the New Testament polemic, for all of its harshness, even abusiveness at times, is not anti-Semitic' (Evans & Hagner 1993:xix).

The traditional Jewish view has been to automatically link the New Testament with the historic anti-Semitism that culminated at Auschwitz. This view remains dominant today. Reform Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf wrote the following.

For us Jews, the gospel narratives present a great many problems, not the least of which is a clear anti-Semitism, found especially in the stories of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, but also throughout the four gospels – animus against the Pharisees (which is to say the rabbis) and sometimes against the priests, the elders or even the entire community of Jews.

(Wolf 1997:377)

Over the last few decades, however, as more Jews have entered the realm of New Testament scholarship, other voices have emerged. Alan Segal concluded the following:

The argument between Judaism and Christianity was at the beginning largely a family affair. After Christianity separated from Judaism, the polemical passages in the New Testament were read in an unhistorical way, as testimony of hatred between two separate religions, when they should have been read as strife between two sects of the same religion.

(Segal 1986:144)

This Section will survey such views and the methodologies used to analyze the documents themselves. The scholars are divided into three categories. The first, the traditional or unsympathetic reading, sees the New Testament as categorically anti-Jewish, with no possibility of vindication. The second, an intermediate view, is more balanced. Good arguments from both sides are discussed and recognized as legitimate, and it is admitted that the question is more complex than had previously been thought. Finally, a sympathetic reading is given. These scholars see the issue as basically an intra-Jewish debate among groups in the first century, rather than a condemnation of Jews or Judaism as a whole.

3.3.1 Unsympathetic view (Sandmel and Cook)

The first full book on the subject, from a Jewish perspective, was written by Samuel Sandmel. He employed the latest scholarship of the day, and he should be applauded for his pioneering efforts. Overall, however, he saw the New Testament in a negative light. He offers little discussion about the possibility of alternative explanations that might read certain passages in a different way. For him, the New Testament is 'a repository for hostility toward Jews and Judaism' (Sandmel 1978:160).

The question of anti-Semitism in the Gospels, Sandmel says, depends largely on whether they are historically accurate. If the events really occurred, then the authors are merely passing along truth of an understandable inter-Jewish feud. It could then more easily be compared to similar strong language in the Tanakh (Sandmel 1978:xvii). On the other hand, if the authors have fabricated material to meet the needs of their present day circumstances, then there is a stronger case for anti-Semitism in the Gospels (Sandmel 1978:46).

Sandmel follows the scholars who question virtually all of the New Testament's historicity. Much of this work is actually a summary of the New Testament books with an accompanying explanation of how each was assembled. He believed it is 'not correct to exempt the New Testament from anti-Semitism and to allocate it to later periods of

history' since 'its expression is to be found in Christian Scripture for all to read' (Sandmel, 1978:143-44).

Paul brought the message to the Gentiles. In doing so, the Jewish aspect of the message –specifically the law – became less important. It was not only downplayed, it was 'annulled' (Sandmel 1978:8). Sandmel describes Paul's attitude to the law as 'uniquely negative' (Sandmel 1978:10). This, he believed, provided a criticism of Judaism that would later show up in the written Gospels.

He begins with Mark, the first Gospel to be written. Not only does Mark show Jews in general in a negative light, his treatment of the Jewish disciples is 'scarcely less derogatory than that of Jews'. For example, they are shown misunderstanding Jesus, falling asleep at important moments, and even denying him. The motive for this, Sandmel writes, is to affirm the Gentile communities to whom Mark was writing. If the Gospel message began with the Jews, he asks, how could non-Jews 'be assured of their authenticity'? This Gospel, then, was constructed for the very purpose of assuring Gentile members of the Church of their 'full validity'. He writes: 'In normal controversies the assertion of one's own validity is followed by denigrating one's opponent' (Sandmel 1978:46-47).

Matthew's Gospel, Sandmel says, 'is a mixture of sublimity and astonishing animosity' (Sandmel 1978:68). The latter is perhaps best exemplified by Matthew 27:25, where the crowd says, 'His blood shall be on us and our children'. Sandmel comments,

The intent in the verse is that the Jews here have accepted responsibility for the death of Jesus and that their children inherit that responsibility.... Did "all the people" truly say that? Did they truly wish to transmit guilt to succeeding generations? Or do we have here in this verse the single item that is the most glaring example of New Testament anti-Semitic passages?

(Sandmel 1978:66)

Luke's Gospel, along with Acts, is much more subtle. His concern was to 'win Jews and still portray recurrent malevolence' (Sandmel 1978:73). The very actions of the Jewish people in Luke's Gospel are, according to Sandmel, 'their own indictment' (Sandmel 1978:83). But, it is in John that the debate takes a radically different turn. The Synoptics focus on what Jesus did, whereas the question in John concerns who he is. Sandmel acknowledges that the term 'the Jews' could refer to Judaeans, but it is mainly used to designate opponents of Jesus. In John, 'the targets are the Jews of that later period when his Gospel was written (between A.D. 100 – 110) and of the unknown area in which he lived' (Sandmel 1978:101-102).

Of course, all the disciples are Jews as well (not to mention Jesus). But, Sandmel explains how John's strategy helps minimize the reader's understanding of this. It is achieved by including two unique phenomena not found in the Synoptics. First, John writes of Jews who were part of the Christian movement but have fallen away. Second, he also writes of Jews who wanted to enter but who were deterred because of expulsion from the synagogue.

The subtle point is that in the synoptics the disciples and apostles are all conceived of, whether for praise or dispraise, as Jews; in John it is as if the new movement has few if any Jews within it, and therefore the Jews are outsiders and opponents.

(Sandmel 1978:102)

A student of Sandmel's, Rabbi Michael J. Cook, approached the subject just a few years later. His article likewise presents a largely one-sided critique, where the possibility of vindication of given passages is almost beyond discussion. Primarily, he confronts the claim made by conservative Christian scholars that although later traditions definitely put an anti-Jewish spin on the events, the New Testament itself does not. Cook's response sets the tone for the remainder of the article.

I aver that the pejorative description of Judaism in later Christian theology takes its cue directly from the New Testament itself.... Just as later preachers may have been investing their personal biases into their commentaries on the New Testament, so also may the four evangelists themselves have given vent to their personal ill will toward Jews in their very act of describing Jesus' life in their gospels.

(Cook 1983a:127)

After the summary, he focuses on specific New Testament authors and their works. He believes Paul has been misunderstood both by the early Church Fathers and modern commentators as well. Paul was actually saying something quite different from the supercessionist message promoted by the early Church: 'Whereas Paul asked the question in Romans, "Has then God rejected his people?" with his answer being, "By no means!" (Romans 11:1), the reply of certain later church spokesman was, in effect, "By all means!"' (Cook 1983a:129).

Paul was a Jew who had a 'positive kinship' toward his fellow Jews (Cook 1983a:129). It is in the Gospels, then, that Cook will promote his thesis. Like Sandmel, he explains the methodology and motive of each evangelist.

Mark's Gospel is best understood in his portrayal of Jewish leaders. Since Jesus is 'repeatedly' in controversy with chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees, Mark gives the impression that Jesus 'is over and against the Jewish

leaders of his time'. But, this is not all. The 'masses' in the Passion narratives call for the crucifixion. Therefore, 'in Mark's view the Jews as a people (and not merely their leaders) reject and condemn Jesus' (Cook 1983a:130). According to Cook, Mark's view of Jewish leaders is actually a strategy to condemn Judaism itself. This is explained by noting that the scribes and Pharisees were the forerunners of the rabbis who, after 70 C.E., 'fashioned the Judaism which emerged from the ashes of the Temple's destruction' (Cook 1983a:131). Mark was therefore writing in response to his own circumstances, promoting Christianity by denigrating the roots of its current rival.

Cook sees Matthew's attitude toward Jews likewise as 'often one of denigration'. Matthew, he believes, intended to 'intensify' the words and tone of Mark's message (Cook 1983a:131). This is seen, most notably, in the strong words against scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. Matthew is also the only one who records such events as Matthew 27:25 ('let his blood be on our children') and Matthew 28:12 (the chief priests bribing the guards).

He then discusses Matthew 5:17. While many scholars see this passage as demonstrating a 'favorable disposition toward Judaism', Cook has a different understanding. This and other seemingly pro-Jewish passages are just as suspect as those that immediately seem to be negative (a theme he elaborates on in another article, see Cook 1983b). What appears to be Matthew's positive spin on the Law of Moses is 'but a function of his overall disparagement of Judaism'. Matthew's entire purpose in the Sermon on the Mount is to 'demonstrate the inadequacy of Mosaic law in comparison to the new law introduced by Jesus to supersede it' (Cook 1983a:132).

The Gospel of Luke 'preserves many of the anti-Jewish notices of the other evangelists' (Cook 1983a:132). For example, Cook identifies 'denigration of the Jews' in the parable of the Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), as well as the parables of the Great Supper (Lk 14:15-24) and that of the Publican and Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14). Yet, Luke's image of Judaism is 'distinctly more favorable' than Mark or Matthew. This too, is based on an ulterior motive. The seemingly positive factors are

only a function of Luke's overarching concern to demonstrate that the early Christian believers (and especially the figures of Jesus and Paul) were faithful to Judaism and its institutions, and to prove thereby that Christianity is the true continuation of the heart of genuine Judaism. Accordingly, those Jews who have rejected Jesus are, by virtue of that rejection, inauthentic Jews.

(Cook 1983a:133)

John's Gospel has often been singled out as the most anti-Jewish of the four. This is due in large part to the term 'the Jews' that appears frequently, and usually in a

negative context. For Cook, this makes the presentation 'all the more sever'. The enemies of Jesus no longer seem to be only a segment of the Jewish people, he writes, 'but rather the entire Jewish people' (Cook 1983a:134). Jesus and his followers are also described in a way that 'makes the reader of John apt to forget that they are Jewish'. As examples, Cook cites 13:33 and 8:17. Finally, the situation in John is heightened by its bold theological claim. Jesus is 'identified with God' in this Gospel (John 8:19 and 8:24 are cited), therefore, 'John's indictment of the Jews suddenly becomes the very sentiment of God himself' (Cook 1983a:134).

Cook's article was published three decades ago. In his more recent work, he takes a similar approach with some modifications (Cook 2008:192-232) Sandmel and Cook wrote just prior to the 'Third Quest', which began to focus on the Jewishness of Jesus. This was also before the current wave of Jewish scholars entered the field of New Testament studies. These factors would lead to a new, more balanced approach to the subject. Yet, the unsympathetic view remains popular in some circles (Freudmann 1993).

3.3.2 Intermediate view (Levine and Reinhartz)

In a 1999 article, Amy-Jill Levine addressed the subject of anti-Judaism in the Gospel of Matthew. Her assessment is somewhat mixed, as she explains in her opening. She believes that 'there is, on my reading, an anti-Jewish component to the First Gospel'. On the other hand, she continues, 'there is less anti-Judaism in Matthew's text than has sometimes been suggested' (Levine 1999:9). She then surveys various approaches that scholars have taken when addressing this subject, in three main categories. These include: 1. *prophetic anti-Judaism*, 2. *Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism* and 3. *Gentilizing anti-Judaism*, although different scholars have used slightly different names.

The first category is *prophetic anti-Judaism*. This approach equates Matthew's Gospel with the Jewish prophets of old and/or with the Qumran literature. It is seen as an internal critique, which would imply a sort of in-house debate. But such comparisons, Levine says, are 'compromised' for three reasons (Levine 1999:16).

First, she writes, 'the quantity or popularity of a particular manner of discourse does not keep that discourse from being abusive' (Levine 1999:16). In this category, she includes the following arguments: 1) Matthew's 'presentation is entirely one-sided' because there is no 'indication of reconciliation'; 2) since the 'targets' of this Gospel's rhetoric are eventually described as killing the speaker, 'the matter of its typicality is irrelevant' and; 3) a comparison between the Gospels and the Dead Sea Scrolls 'falters' since the former 'presupposes an audience outside of Judaism broadly defined' (Levine 1999:17).

Second, she writes: 1) The prophets and their audience were all part of the same community, which ‘centered around common symbols, confessions, history, and traditions’; 2) unlike the prophets, Matthew does not attempt ‘to bring people back to a proper relationship with the Deity’. The focus is not on repentance, but ‘a turn to something new’; and 3) the prophets offered ‘separate oracles spoken by an individual’. By contrast, the Gospels use various speech mechanisms, including a narrator. Because of this, the opponents of Jesus ‘are attacked from both sides’ (Levine 1999:17-18).

The third argument against analogies between the Gospel and other Jewish literature concerns the degree of ‘current rhetorical practices’. She argues: 1) Jesus was sometimes condemned specifically because of what he said (she cites Matthew 21:45-46a). Since his audience ‘did not find the rhetoric tolerable’, Levine reasons, ‘why should those outside the Gospel?’; 2) she rejects the argument that Matthew sought to ‘shock and revive’ Jews outside the church, because ‘the Gospel is more an in-house manual than a missionary tract’; and 3) unlike the Dead Sea Scrolls, the followers of Jesus ‘fought their battle for self-definition in the same neighborhood as the synagogue’ (Levine 1999:18).

The second category, *Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism*, is ‘one of sociology’ (Levine 1999:18-19). This argument says that the Jewish Christians of Matthew’s community are promoting a different, better form of Judaism. The main problem with this, she says, is that there are too many unsettled issues. For example, ‘debate still exists as to whether Matthew is inside, outside, in between’ (Levine 1999: 20). Matthew’s community is also somewhat of a mystery regarding geography, demography and their relationship to the synagogue. ‘Arguments for evangelist’s Jewishness’, she writes, ‘are equally fuzzy’ (Levine 1999:21). She continues:

To proclaim that Matthew is “Jewish” thus produces an overly expansive definition of Judaism, since the descriptions would also fit Judaizers or the gentile heirs of an originally (ethnically) Jewish congregation. But to proclaim Matthew as “non-Jewish” may produce an overly narrow one.

(Levine 1999:22, 23)

Levine is right to point out the differences between the Gospels and the other forms of Jewish literature. But, exactly how much these differences in themselves effect the question at hand may be debated (for a thorough critique of her article, see Carter 1999; Shular 1999). Matthew’s Jewishness is also an area needing more discussion. On one hand, Levine says too much remains unknown to make definite statements. Yet, some of her own responses rest on the assumption that Matthew is somehow outside of Jewish boundaries.

The third category is *Gentile anti-Judaism*. This view says that ‘Jews are rejected as a people and Judaism is rejected as a practice’ (Levine 1999:26). Here Levine cites several passages from Matthew that have been used to make such a case. As she demonstrates, these interpretations are not the only or the best way to read these verses. Two prominent examples will be discussed here. Matthew 23, for example, contains some of the strongest and harshest language in the New Testament.

Levine makes a distinction between the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people as a whole in Matthew 23. On one hand, she says, ‘scribes and Pharisees’ may indeed represent all Jews. But, ‘vilification of the leaders may not indicate vilification of the followers’, since Matthew separates the leaders from the people, Jerusalem from outside regions and ‘the center from the periphery’ (Levine 1999:32). She further argues,

Additionally, the anti-Jewish potential of the chapter is possibly mitigated by the evangelist’s tendency to use anti-Pharisaic language for in-house instruction; as in the Matthew 8 reference to the “children of the *basileia*,” so in Matthew 23 the hypocritical Pharisee refers to the hypocritical Peter, or pastor or professor of theology.

(Levine 1999:32)

These words are then somewhat offset by her final remark on this passage. Jews who do not follow Jesus remain ‘lost sheep of the house of Israel’. The negative example, she concludes, ‘remains the Jew’ (Levine 1999:32).

The other passage which has caused great difficulty is Matthew 27:25, where ‘all the people’ shout the words, ‘his blood be upon us and our children’. While she does not believe this account is historical, she nevertheless argues against an anti-Jewish reading. She makes a distinction between ‘all the people’ who speak before Pilate, and ‘the Jews’ as a community.

Joseph of Arimathea, the women who follow Jesus and weep for him, and even the repentant Peter do not cease being Jewish. Thus “all the people” (Matthew 27:25) who stood to condemn Jesus cannot mean “all Jews.” It rather means “all the people of Jerusalem.”

(Levine 1999:32)

Levine concludes (‘with great reluctance’) by stating that the gospel of Matthew is anti-Jewish. This reaction is not exclusive to her. Even in Matthew’s own community, she writes, the Gospel would have ‘stirred up hostility’ toward any Jew who preferred traditional (non Jesus-believing) Judaism (Levine 1999:35-36).

Three years later, Levine wrote an article on the same subject and took a much more agnostic stance. She said that ‘neither historical nor literary nor any other critical method can resolve the question of whether the synoptic Gospels and Acts were written with an anti-Jewish agenda and/or whether they were read as anti-Jewish by their original audiences’ (Levine 2002:98).

For Levine, the Gospels in themselves remain a mystery. They can be seen as anti-Jewish, and they can be exonerated. But, the mixture of these documents with the later writers who used them toward an undeniably anti-Semitic end is ever an issue: ‘The synoptic authors would, I believe, be appalled at what has been done to Jewish communities in Jesus’ name for close to two millennia. Nevertheless, these texts do plant seeds that, with certain types of fertilizer, yield an anti-Jewish growth’ (Levine 2002:97).

Like Levine, Adele Reinhartz is a leading New Testament scholar who writes passionately about the New Testament’s view of Jews and Judaism. Her first article on the subject attempted to ‘explore the relationship between the reader and the New Testament’ (Reinhartz 1988:526). Using the discipline of reader-response criticism, she proposes three ways that texts may be read. The first is the implied reader, which refers to the actual person (or group) the author is addressing. Next is the ideal reader, or someone who is capable of fully understanding the text. Finally, there is the real reader. This person comes to the text with an existing set of beliefs and influences that may alter their understanding. After discussing various possibilities, her final analysis is somewhat ambivalent.

While it is true that the main thrust of the Gospels in their explicit descriptions of Jesus and the relationship of Jewish groups to Jesus is negative, there is other information within the Gospel stories themselves that could be seen as an internal critique of that description.

(Reinhartz 1988:536)

The focus of much of her studies, however, has been the gospel of John. We will focus here on the article she contributed to the book *Jesus, Judaism and Christian anti-Judaism*, which she also co-edited. It most succinctly and directly addresses the topic, and it includes the relevant information from her other works. She begins by acknowledging that harsh words and thoughts do exist in the Gospel of John. However, it is ‘not entirely negative about Jews and Judaism’. In fact, ‘the Gospel of John is intimately tied to the Judaism of its time’ (Reinhartz 2004:99).

Reinhartz views the Gospel of John on three narrative levels, or stories that are taking place simultaneously. These include the historical, the cosmological and the

ecclesiological. The first category, the historical, refers to the actual events of the life of Jesus. She acknowledges that Jesus and most of the other characters are Jews who 'participate fully in the Jewish world of early first century Palestine'. They live according to the Jewish calendar, particularly the Sabbath and the festivals, and their lives revolve around the synagogue and the Temple (Reinhartz 2004:100). Even Jesus' 'Christological identity', she writes, 'is in large measure expressed in Jewish terms' as, for example, the disciples recognize him as the Messiah promised in scripture (Reinhartz 2004:102). But, there are also limitations to this presentation: 'The Jewish identities of Jesus and his followers are taken for granted. Yet, despite their obvious Jewishness, the label "Jew" is applied to Jesus only once (by the Samaritan woman, 4:9) and his followers and disciples never' (Reinhartz 2004:103).

By focusing on the rarity of the occurrence, she has circumvented the question of why Jesus is referred to as a Jew at all. This question will become more relevant later in the article when Reinhartz discusses the word *ioudaioi*. She also makes no mention of the fact that Jesus is called rabbi eight times in the Gospel of John.

There are also passages where Jesus 'explicitly dissociates himself from Judaism' (Reinhartz 2004:101). This is seen in statements such as 8:17 and 10:34 where he uses the expression 'your law'. But, given the Jewish way that Jesus is represented throughout (as Reinhartz mostly acknowledges), this accusation may be hasty. There are other possible interpretations of these verses and a discussion of such views would have been helpful here. For example, Louis Feldman said John might have meant 'your interpretation of the law' or 'the interpretation of the law on the part of those who have the nerve to call themselves good Jews' (Feldman 2001:380).

Also in the historical tale, Reinhartz documents the events that show the Jews as 'opponents' to Jesus. These include persecuting Jesus for both healing on the Sabbath and for 'calling God his own father'. They also took up stones to throw at him in John 8:59 and 10:31 (Reinhartz 2004:103). The remainder of the examples she offers are actually individuals or specific groups within Judaism, rather than 'the Jews' as a whole – this is an important point. She mentions the arrest that was called for by priests and Pharisees, the trials before Annas and Caiaphas, and the chief priests who shouted 'crucify him'. She concludes: 'The Jews, or at least their authorities, are directly responsible for Jesus' death on the cross, despite the fact that it is Pilate who gave the final order for Jesus' crucifixion' (Reinhartz 2004:104).

The second narrative level, or tale, is the cosmological. This approach deals with theological issues such as the covenant and chosenness. The Jewish people are in a covenant with God based on the Torah. In John 5:39 and 5:46 Jesus says that the

Torah prophesied his coming and bears witness to his identity. Many did not believe this about him and this caused the debate. The essence of the controversy, Reinhartz writes, 'concerns precisely the question of their different and mutually exclusive ways of understanding the covenantal relationship' (Reinhartz 2004:106).

Regarding salvation, the cosmological story has two basic groups. Those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah and receive salvation are said to be in the light. The other group, those who reject Jesus, are in darkness. These are universal categories, equally true of Jews or Gentiles. But, as Reinhartz notes, 'the Gospel consistently and directly associates the negative pole with explicitly Jewish characters within the narrative' (Reinhartz 2004:105). This is seen most clearly in John 8:44, where the opponents ('the Jews') are called children of the devil. The real question remains – why does John use the term 'the Jews' to characterize his opponents, when it is clear that most of Jesus' followers were Jews as well? Reinhartz sees this problem at every level: 'But the Gospel of John ascribes a villainous role to the Jews in its historical tale, associates them with the negative terms through the rhetoric of binary opposition in its Christological tale, and undermines Jewish covenantal identity in its cosmological tale' (Reinhartz 2004:110).

The third narrative level is the ecclesiological. This tale, she writes, is 'not explicitly present in the Gospel narrative' (Reinhartz 2004:111). It needs to be reconstructed by scholars. This refers to the relationship between the Johannine community and others at the time of the Gospel's writing – the late first century. The debates in the Gospel of John, many believe, are based more on that contemporary situation than in the life of Jesus.

The puzzling usage of the term *ioudaioi* is discussed in this context. Reinhartz reiterates that the term is 'almost never used to describe Jesus or his followers'. The term may be used in a 'neutral and descriptive' way, and can even be used positively (she cites John 4:22). But, in most cases it is used to 'express a negative view of the Jews as a group, as the ones who reject Jesus, refuse to believe in him, and ultimately plot his death' (Reinhartz 2004:112). For Reinhartz, the negative examples outweigh and make void the neutral and positive usages.

Most important, the fact that the same word occurs numerous times and in a variety of contexts tends to blur the fine distinctions and nuances implied by these contexts and to generalize the meaning to its broadest possible referent, namely, to the Jews as a nation defined by a set of religious beliefs, cultic and religious practices, and a sense of peoplehood.

(Reinhartz 2004:114)

This line of thinking marginalizes the neutral or positive references. Yet, some of these passages are vital to the discussion. As mentioned above, she offers no comment on John 4:9, where Jesus is specifically designated 'a Jew'. This is surprising, especially since Reinhartz sees the Gospel of John as an unfolding drama. Jesus is the hero. The villains are not all Jewish people per se, since many Jews are clearly on the same side as the hero. Rather, the villains are the ones who oppose the hero, and this group is often given the label 'the Jews'. This begs the question of why John uses this term for Jesus. Indeed, if the very label used to vilify (demonize?) the bad guys is also used of the hero, is it legitimate to ignore this on the basis that it occurs 'only' once?

Scholars continue to debate John's use of the word *ioudaioi*. Some have suggested it means 'Jewish authorities' while others say it refers to a geographical identity. Reinhartz responds that both proposals 'let the evangelist off a bit too easily'. In the late first century, particularly in the diaspora (where John was probably written), 'the term was used to denote both an ethnic-geographic identity and a religious identity that was not limited to Jews who lived in Judea or who were born of Judean parents' (Reinhartz 2004:113).

What, then, was the author's purpose in using the word *ioudaioi*? Reinhartz's answer is sympathetic, as she places 'Johannine beliefs' within the Jewish world (although the Johannine community itself was in a process of transition). However later commentators misunderstood John's message, his own motives seem to represent an intra-Jewish debate (although she does not use this phrase). She says: 'Perhaps, given the proximity of Johannine belief to its Jewish roots, the evangelist needed to distinguish his own understanding of salvation and the covenant between humankind and the Divine very sharply from that of other forms of Judaism' (Reinhartz 2004:115).

Reinhartz and Levine have provided extremely valuable insight into the question of Jews and Judaism in the New Testament. Questions remain, for sure. But many of the previously held assumptions may be explained by examining the texts in their original context. This is important for biblical studies. The value for Jewish-Christian relations may or may not be as clear. For some, the very connection of these texts with their later misuse is enough to quarantine them. Jeremy Cohen wrote the following:

Nevertheless, no efforts to put John's negative portrayal of the Jews into its proper historical context can undo the intensity of the anti-Jewish message that it transmitted to posterity. Once he circulated his gospel, the evangelist surrendered control over its meaning to his readers, and they, interpreting the gospel as they did over the course of many centuries, only sharpened its anti-Jewish implications.

(Cohen 2007:35)

3.3.3 Sympathetic view (Feldman and Fredriksen)

Louis Feldman brings a unique perspective to the discussion. He is an orthodox Jew who has taught Classics at Yeshiva University for fifty years. In 1990, he published an article in Moment magazine called, 'Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?' which included the following observation:

That the New Testament and quotations from it have been used by anti-Semites for anti-Semitic purposes cannot be doubted. But that is a different question from whether the New Testament is in fact and by intention anti-Semitic. That question requires us to look at the book – or rather, collection of books – itself, and not just as isolated quotations...My own examination of the New Testament has led me to the conclusion that, as a whole, it is not anti-Semitic.

(Feldman 1990:32)

A few years later, the article appeared in a modified form in a collection of his writings. The New Testament is first compared with other ancient literature. The anti-Judaism that does exist in these documents, he says, is understandable. He sees it as both a defensive move responding to claims that Christianity was 'no longer Jewish', and also an offensive strategy 'in claiming that it, and not its parent, was the true Judaism'. In fact, it was a 'common phenomenon' for new movements 'to show special hostility towards his or its parents and vice versa'. Examples are then given from Tanakh, the Dead Sea Scrolls and even Josephus (Feldman 1996: 278-279).

Passages from the Gospels are cited to make his point. Matthew 27:25, where 'all the people' take responsibility for the death of Jesus is not actually a condemnation of all Jews. Rather, it refers to the specific crowd that was present at the time (Feldman 1996:279).

The anti-Judaism in Mark is 'hardly prominent' (Feldman 1996:281). Luke's presentation is slightly more mixed. On one hand, he replaces the word 'crowd' with 'the people' who demanded the crucifixion (Lk 23:13). In Acts 2:36 and 3:13 the people are seen to be responsible for his death (Feldman 1996:281). However, Luke (through the words of Cleopas, Lk 24:20), singles out the chief priests and rulers as being responsible. Luke also 'softens the impact' of the accusations since he reveals the Jewish multitude later felt remorse (Lk 23:27-31, 48). Likewise, Jesus asked for forgiveness for the crowd because they did not know what they were doing (Lk 23:34), and Stephen (Ac 7:60) also asks for mercy on behalf of the Jews as he was dying (Feldman 1996:281).

In Acts, Luke sometimes uses the term 'Jews' negatively, although, he states, some Jews did respond favorably to Paul's message, and others were divided. There are also frequent references to the prophets who were persecuted by the Jews. But this,

Feldman writes, 'is a common motif in the Jewish pseudepigrapha and in the rabbinic literature' (Feldman 1996:282).

The Gospel of John has always been the most troublesome. Feldman quotes Kaufman Kohler, who called it 'a Gospel of Christian love and Jew hatred' (Feldman 1996:282). Regarding John's frequent use of the term 'the Jews', Feldman proposes a solution. Since John was presumably writing to Gentiles, the specific categories of Jews (mentioned in the Synoptics) would be 'hard to follow' and a general term might have been more relevant.

He also acknowledges the following about the Gospel of John: 1) The term ('the Jews') sometimes simply means Judaeans; 2) John 4:22 says that salvation is from the Jews (to which Feldman remarks, 'Could there be any more pro-Jewish comment than this?'); 3) Jewish leaders gave Jesus an 'appropriate' burial; 4) some of the harshest words are actually spoken to Jewish Christians, not those who 'remain Jews' (Jn 8:30-31); 5) Jesus is clearly identified as a Jew (Jn 4:9); 6) the Jewish festivals play a more prominent role than in the Synoptics; 7) Roman involvement in his death is mentioned at the trial (Jn 11:48); 8) John uniquely mentions Roman guards who came to arrest Jesus (Jn 18:3); and 9) the Synoptics have the crowd against Jesus, whereas in John 'only the chief priests and the officers are present in Pilate's proceedings' (Feldman 1996:283-285).

Feldman also comments on 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, often thought to be an unequivocal example of Jewish guilt in killing Jesus. But this would hardly make sense coming from Paul, who was 'proud of his Jewishness'. The grammar of the phrase has also been misunderstood, Feldman believes. He argues that the correct translation is to 'read the relative clause as restricted, that is, it refers not to all Jews but to those who killed Jesus' (Feldman 1996:285-286). He concludes the article with the following:

To be sure, the New Testament contains a number of passages that are anti-Jewish and that have been used to arise hatred of Jews. Such passages must be acknowledged and condemned. But such passages are a distinct minority of the text and were not used for such purposes with any frequency until the period of the crusades and modern times.

(Feldman 1996:286)

In a 2002 article, Paula Fredriksen documents the changes that occurred over the early centuries of Christianity. While certain ecclesiastical structures began after Constantine, the basic points of theology – including a high Christology – 'seem already present in the Christian canon' (Fredriksen 2002:9). To understand the dynamic of the New Testament, it is important to recognize contemporary Jewish views of both Gentiles and

rival Jewish groups. For example, Fredriksen writes, Gentiles were in a sense expected to worship foreign gods although it was hoped they would eventually turn to the one true god of the Jews. This hope is expressed in the *Alenu* (Fredriksen 2002:15). But, the way Jewish groups reacted to one other was something quite different.

Extremely tolerant of those outside the fold, Jews were rancorously, almost exuberantly, intolerant of variety within the fold. Battling with each other over the correct way to be Jewish was (one could say, is) a timeless Jewish activity, and at no time more so than in the late Second Temple period, precisely the lifetime of Jesus and of Paul.

(Fredriksen 2002:15)

In this context, the harsh words against Pharisees and others expressed in the New Testament are 'extremely normal' (Fredriksen 2002:16). The Gospels and the letters of Paul were written during the time when the movement 'was still a type of Second Temple Judaism'. Indeed, the strong polemical tone contained in the New Testament, Fredriksen writes, 'is exactly the measure of their Jewishness' (Fredriksen 2002:18).

As the movement spread, it soon arrived in places devoid of any Jewish understanding. Leaders such as Valentinus and Marcion in the second century began to read the New Testament documents through the lens of Greek philosophy. The likes of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus and Hippolytus furthered the understanding of the New Testament away from its Jewish context. 'This was the Church' Fredriksen writes, 'that, in 312 Constantine chose to patronize' (Fredriksen 2002: 27). In the eyes of these Church Fathers, 'Jesus had taught against Judaism. So had Paul' (Fredriksen 2002:27-28). This, and not the New Testament documents themselves, is the genesis of Christian anti-Judaism.

Christian antipathy toward Jews and Judaism began when Christian Hellenistic Jewish texts, such as the letters of Paul and the Gospels, began to circulate among total outsiders, that is among Gentiles without any connection or attachment to Jewish traditions of practice and interpretation. At that point, the intra-Jewish polemics preserved in these texts began to be understood as condemnations of Judaism *taut court*.

(Fredriksen 2002:28-29)

3.3.4 Conclusion

The last century has witnessed a Jewish reclamation of Jesus, and, to a lesser extent, of Paul. This by no means refers to complete agreement with what they said, or with what others have said about them. It is an acknowledgment that in some way they fall within the boundaries of Judaism broadly defined. It is perhaps premature to speak of a Jewish reclamation of the New Testament. But, the stream of Jewish New Testament

scholarship in recent decades has begun to challenge the earlier, unsympathetic view that once dominated. More understanding about Second Temple Judaism, combined with the improvement (to some degree) of Jewish-Christian relations, has allowed Jewish scholars to take a new, more objective look at the situation.

This field of study is still new, and the last word on the subject has definitely not been written. Many questions remain about first century Judaism(s), as well as both the communities that produced each of the four gospels and the communities to whom they were addressed. The relationship between the New Testament and the later legacy of persecution needs to be further studied. It is encouraging, however, that Jewish scholars have been moving away from the automatic labeling of the New Testament as undeniably and completely anti-Semitic.

This issue is less directly related to the resurrection of Jesus than the others in this Chapter. But, there is a connection. If the New Testament is seen as anti-Semitic, then the possibility of it offering good news is irrelevant, at least for Jews. If it is not assumed to be anti-Semitic, this does not make the resurrection more likely or even more possible. It does, however, take away a major stumbling block that might otherwise end the discussion before it begins.

3.4 RESURRECTION

The belief in an afterlife has been greatly challenged in the modern world. This has been especially true in the Jewish community. Byron Sherwin has shown that American Jews have statistically been less affirming of an afterlife compared with all other American groups. But, the figure has been steadily increasing in recent years. Polls showed 19 percent believed in an afterlife in the 1970s, and that figure rose to 46 percent by the 1990s (Sherwin 2006:14).

For those who do acknowledge an afterlife in Judaism, there have been two main competing ideas: resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. The former, many scholars believe, may be traced back to the Tanakh and is a foundational Jewish belief. Other scholars have denied the existence of resurrection in the earliest Jewish documents. The one passage commonly admitted to be unequivocally speaking of resurrection is Daniel 12:1-3. The question, then, concerns the meaning and scope of this passage and whether or not it is alluded to previously. Traditional (rabbinic) Judaism believes resurrection may be found throughout the Tanakh. The Reform movement of Judaism embraces the immortality of the soul over belief a resurrection.

In the last twenty years several Jewish scholars have written major works on resurrection and related topics. These will be studied here. The first Section will

compare two views of the Tanakh. Does it proclaim resurrection, hint at it, or deny the concept completely? The next Section will survey the historical development of the two competing views of an afterlife in Judaism. These will help discern the validity of the Jewish denial of resurrection. The third Section examines Paul's view. Whether he favors bodily resurrection or a form of transmigration of the soul has been debated. Scholars are divided on how much Jewish and/or pagan influence he incorporated. For our purposes here, the question is whether or not he believed in a physical resurrection, as opposed to a purely spiritual (non-physical) resurrection.

3.4.1 Resurrection in the Tanakh

Alan F. Segal wrote extensively on life after death in the ancient world. He devotes two chapters of his mammoth study to the question of resurrection in ancient Israel. While he sometimes acknowledges possible hints of resurrection in the Tanakh, he ultimately saw 'no concrete narrative of the afterlife' (Segal 2004:121) within its pages. One probable reason for this silence, particularly in the earliest period, has to do with competing pagan deities. These polytheistic religions had 'pantheons of divinities' that might open the possibility of idolatry among the monotheistic Israelites.

Some of the specific language is likewise inconclusive. The concept of Sheol is discussed, and Segal sees tension in the various usages. He wonders if this represents evolution in the development of monotheism, or 'an alternative poetic trope' which was used by those who wrote the Psalms and prophecy (Segal 2004:138). The Hebrew word *nephesh* is often translated 'soul', but it did not contain the same meaning in ancient Israel as it later would in regards to determining what part of a person, if any, continues on after death (Segal 2004:143). The difference in word usage between the modern and the ancient is telling: 'We think we have a soul; the Hebrews thought they were a soul' (Segal 2004:144).

Segal allows for resurrection-like experiences among certain individuals in order for God to make a point. These do not prove that resurrection was commonly believed. The narratives of Elijah and Elisha contain three accounts of revivifications, which are not the same as resurrection. The difference is that those who are merely revived return to live their normal lives and will one day die. These events are recorded as miracles, and they are meant to show 'the power of God over death and the extent of God's favor to the prophets' (Segal 2004:145). The fate of Elijah and Enoch, on the other hand, may provide a closer parallel with resurrection. However, they are the exceptions. They 'prove the rule by violating it in such circumstances as to clarify that they are the only two exceptions' (Segal 2004:154).

Another exception is Saul's experience with the medium at Endor. Saul was surely sinning when he sought to contact Samuel. This was a violation of law, approaching the forbidden practices of the pagan nations (Dt 18:9-14). It was forbidden, but it was possible. According to the Scriptures, he writes, 'the dead can be recalled' (Segal 2004:126). Not only that, 'the dead Samuel is still a prophet and knows the outcome of the forthcoming battle' (Segal 2004:130).

The book of Job, Segal argues, is clear evidence that resurrection was unknown. If there was such a thing, then Job would have had no case against God, since the final score would be settled at a later date (Segal 2004:147). Job 19:25, often used as evidence *for* an afterlife, is dismissed: 'the text has been garbled, and we cannot tell exactly what Job intended to say' (Segal; 2004:151). Before moving on to the later prophets, Segal poses the following question: 'Could it really be that God spent so much time giving His prophets messages of antagonism to the notion of Canaanite afterlife only to reverse Himself later on? Changes in the concept of the afterlife over time argue against taking it literally' (Segal 2004:170).

The book of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) continues along the same lines as Job. According to Segal, the author 'goes beyond pessimism and agnosticism about the life after death' (Segal 2004:254). But, in the Second Temple Period as a whole there would be a change, where, many would say, the notion of an afterlife begins to come into focus. Here too, however, Segal denies a literal belief in resurrection.

Evidence of an afterlife appears in Ezekiel 37, the vision of the dry bones coming to life. Segal acknowledges that 'no passage in the Hebrew Bible appears to be more a discussion of bodily resurrection'. Yet, he continues, there is 'no evidence' that this passage is actually speaking of resurrection. Rather, it uses that metaphor to proclaim national regeneration, and it speaks of the present not the future (Segal 2004:256). Likewise, the language in Isaiah 24-27 (and specifically Is 26:19) sounds like resurrection but is 'not likely to be meant literally' (Segal 2004:258). He concludes,

However, even if both these passages are taken as references to literal resurrection, they hardly affect the general tenor of Israelite religion, which emphasized life on this earth and behavior in this world.... But these two passages are absolutely crucial for understanding whence the language of resurrection comes.

(Segal 2004:261)

The one clear reference to resurrection is Daniel 12:1-3. The author of this passage is informed by Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 26:19, and Isaiah 66. These texts, along with contemporary historical events and a 'dream or vision' (Segal 2004:264) lead the author to write these words. Daniel 12 promises resurrection to at least some of Israel. Special

rewards will also be given to martyrs, and some scholars see parallels between Isaiah 53 with Daniel's words about those who 'make others wise'. But, Segal was not convinced that the righteous sufferer (of Is 53) was a martyr, or that his death is specifically described in this passage (Segal 2004:266).

Contrary to Segal, Jon D. Levenson's book, *The death and resurrection of Israel*, argues in favor of resurrection in the Tanakh. He wanted to show that the concept is not merely a 'Christian innovation' (Levenson 2008:ix), nor that it originated as part of Second Temple Judaism. Rather, it 'developed slowly and unevenly over the preceding centuries' (Levenson 2008:xiii).

The concept of Sheol has long been a mystery. The word is used in the Tanakh with a variety of nuances. It may be a place from which no one returns (Ps 88), yet God is able to restore one from that very fate (Ps 40:2). Sheol is sometimes a 'universal destination' that describes those who are no longer living. It is somewhat metaphorical in that it appears in Psalms and prophetic literature but never in narrative accounts of death, or legal material describing capital punishment. Sheol, according to Levenson, describes 'the struggle against the powerful and malignant forces that negate life and deprive it of meaning' (Levenson 2008:72).

The Tanakh also describes those who died after a blessed life. Expressions like 'he was gathered to his fathers' must be more than figurative. This was said, for example, of Abraham (Gn 25:8) who clearly was not buried in Mesopotamia where his physical descendants rested (Levenson 2008:73). Those who died within such blessings were able to face their final destiny 'with composure', unlike those who died outside of God's blessing. This second group must then face the 'misery of Sheol, with justified trepidation and despondency' (Levenson 2008:76). This is not yet a clear description of an afterlife, but for Levenson it must be seen to some extent as a foreshadowing.

The most common imagery to explain the opposite of Sheol is that of the Temple. In many places, references to the Temple include the concept of life and even immortality (Ps 15; 133; Ezk 47:1-12). In Jonah's prayer, his cry from the pit of Sheol (Jnh 2:3) is directed to God, who by contrast was in His Temple (Jnh 2:7). Levenson summarizes the Tanakh's description of the Temple as a place of care, purity, justice, security and eternity and more (Levenson 2008:94). Still, death comes even to those who find refuge in the Temple (Levenson 2008:98).

What does live on, according to the Tanakh, is one's name and family lineage. This is important to Levenson's argument, as resurrection will ultimately be a corporate event regarding the house of Israel. Both the Temple and the concept of continuing lineage

help point the reader to something beyond the here and now. They are more than symbols, 'they are the means by which certain types of continuation despite death can be acquired' (Levenson 2008:122). Indeed, both concepts come together in Psalm 128.

The story of Elisha raising a boy from the dead (2 Ki 4) is also not a complete picture of the concept of resurrection that would later emerge. It is of limited scope, and the child would again die. But it was another foreshadowing. It revealed that 'long before the apocalyptic framework came into existence, the resurrection of the dead was thought possible' (Levenson 2008:132).

From here, Levenson turns to the later prophets. Jeremiah and Isaiah specifically promised a new beginning after the exile. The dead nation will live again and hope will be renewed. 'In a word' he writes, 'they prophecy life in place of death' (Levenson 2008:149). This reversal of death 'anticipates' the end-times resurrection of later Jewish history (Levenson 2008:155). Ezekiel 37:14 specifically is an example of resurrection which is 'decoded' as a prediction of coming historical events (Levenson 2008:157). Levenson rejects the idea that Ezekiel was borrowing from Zoroastrianism. He believes, rather, that Ezekiel's words were a type of 'prophetic sign act' and that they more closely anticipate the later view of resurrection than the words of Isaiah (Levenson 2008:159). It is a corporate resurrection for the people of Israel.

Another important concept throughout the Tanakh is life itself. Life is often considered a reward (Pr 3:13-18; 4:20-23), and the word in Hebrew has a great literary range. It may include notions of 'power, skill, confidence, health, blessing, luck, and joy' (Levenson 2008:169). Of specific interest is that of healing, of which there are many examples. To the ancient Israelite, life and healing went hand in hand. This being the case, Levenson asks, 'why cannot the sole and unchallenged Deity who heals lesser wounds also heal the graver malady that is death?' (Levenson 2008:172). These concepts, too, lend to the understanding of a progressive, albeit subtle, understanding of resurrection.

Finally, he arrives at Daniel 12:1-3. This passage is 'rich in intertextual resonance' (Levenson 2008:201). In other words, the language alludes to previous texts from the Tanakh both in words and concepts. Alan Segal and others have noticed this, but have questioned the intent of these earlier authors. For example, Isaiah chapters 25 and 26 (like the Ezekiel passage mentioned above) are sometimes taken metaphorically as a renewal of national Israel. But, Levenson argues, if they did not believe in a literal resurrection, their choice of it as a metaphor was 'highly inappropriate and self defeating'. More importantly, Daniel did not interpret it in that way (Levenson 2008:214). Another relevant antecedent is Isaiah's prophecy of the servant in Isaiah 53. Levenson's interpretation is quite different than Segal's.

It is evident that the vision in Daniel identifies the righteous of its own time of persecution with the servant of that text and sees the language of healing and restoration after death as references to resurrection. The vindication of the servant takes place against the denigration and mistreatment of him by others, to be sure, but the latter do not rise from death to force any punishment (indeed, their death forms no part of Isa. 52:13 -53:12 at all). Rather, the servant, like the “wise” of Daniel 12, “makes the many righteous” (Isa. 53:11; cf Dan 12:3), presumably changing their behavior by some unspecified process, perhaps prophetic preaching.

(Levenson 2008:213)

3.4.2 Resurrection versus immortality of the soul

There are two books that survey the history of Jewish thought on the afterlife. Neil Gillman’s *The death of death*, was published in 1997. Leila Leah Bronner’s book appeared fourteen years later and covers the same basic trajectory. One of the main differences is their respective treatment of resurrection in the Tanakh.

Gillman sees no hint of resurrection in the earlier portions of the Tanakh. Later passages, however, are at least considered for such a possibility. He views Ezekiel 37 as a purely political vision, and the relevant passages in Isaiah are, for the most part, questioned at best. He interprets Daniel 12 through the lens of the historical situation. While he does recognize biblical antecedents in the text, it is the immediate history which provides the clue to its meaning.

Gillman, like many scholars, places the writing of this portion of Daniel in the reign of Antiochus IV. Previous episodes of persecution in Jewish history had been described as punishment for a sinful nation. But, under Antiochus pious Jews were attacked specifically because they were faithful to Torah. In short, this was ‘the experience of Job writ large’ (Gillman 1997:87). The righteous were suffering and there seemed to be no explanation. Daniel’s words in Daniel 12 were meant to address this specific need.

This passage is not concerned with the resurrection of masses of Jews, nor with the resurrection of all the dead, nor the dead of prior generations. Nor is the author concerned with the mechanics of resurrection. He is concerned only with those who died in the persecution of his day.

(Gillman 1997:89)

Bronner, on the other hand, sees evidence of resurrection beginning much earlier. It is at least alluded to in the narratives of Elijah and Elisha raising others from the dead (Bronner 2011:25). There are also several verbs that, in certain contexts, argue for the belief in resurrection. Following John Sawyer, Bronner focuses on the words ‘to awaken’ (Jr 51:39), ‘to stand and to live’ (Ezk 37:4-10), ‘to return or restore’ (Ps 80:15-20) and others. These words come together in Hosea 6:1-3 which speaks of healing, although Bronner sees ‘more hints of bodily resurrection than physical healing’ (Bronner

2011:32). Isaiah 26:19 has a 'high density' of such language and therefore 'clearly asserts the resurrection of the dead, proclaiming that those who lie in the dust of the earth will rise and shout with joy' (Bronner 2011:34). These key words also figure prominently in Daniel 12:2-3: 'The verb "to live" appears paired with "to stand up," and the causative form of "to wake up" is there as well, emphasizing the resurrection theme. This passage is apparently the culmination of a long tradition of conceptualizing resurrection' (Bronner 2011:35).

After the Biblical record, each author turns to the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature. Here, Gillman sees 'significant references' to resurrection. These texts provided a bridge between Daniel and the 'far more fully developed theology of the afterlife' of the rabbis. For Gillman, resurrection became associated not only with God's retribution (as in Daniel), but with God's power as well (Gillman 1997:101-105).

In the same historical period, another view of the afterlife would enter Judaism and function as a rival for resurrection from that time on. It is the concept of the immortality of the soul. This idea can be traced to the Greeks at least as far back as the sixth century BCE, although it would later gain its greatest expression in the works of Plato. In contrast to resurrection, this view states that the soul is indestructible and will continue to exist without the body. The apocryphal book, *The wisdom of Solomon* was one of the most important Jewish works to incorporate this understanding. As Bronner notices, the pervasiveness of both of these views – resurrection and the soul's immortality – 'stand in stark contrast to the Hebrew Bible, with its veiled hints and allusions' (Bronner 2011:57).

Traditional Judaism embraced resurrection in the early rabbinic period. This was seen first of all in liturgy. The *Amidah* was recited three times a day and continues to hold a prominent place in traditional liturgy. This prayer includes paraphrases from Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 26:19. It is now 'all Israel' that will experience resurrection, going beyond Daniel's view (in Gillman's opinion) that only the righteous Jews of Daniel's day will be resurrected (Gillman 1997:123-127).

It is with the writing of the Mishnah (c 200 CE) that 'the doctrine of resurrection has become authoritative Jewish teaching'. In a famous passage (Sanhedrin 10:1), it is stated that among those who have no portion in the world to come are those who say that resurrection of the dead does not derive from Torah (Gillman 1997:113). Both the concept of resurrection itself and the belief that it originates from the Torah are now firmly entrenched in traditional Judaism. As Bronner notices, a new vocabulary came with this new understanding. These include phrases such as 'the resurrection of the dead' and 'the world to come' (Bronner 2011:60).

In the middle ages, Maimonides had quite a bit to say about resurrection. He was firmly planted in traditional Judaism, and yet was quite familiar with Plato and Greek philosophy. In his day, his views caused controversy which led to his famous *Essay on resurrection*. Many of his critics were not convinced of his orthodoxy and a debate continued for two centuries. His views were somewhat of a mixture between resurrection and a belief in the transmigration of the soul, as Gillman explains.

What he is expounding is the doctrine of “double dying.” We die once, our own bodies return to the earth and our souls leave the body. Then we are resurrected with our bodies and souls coming together again. Next we die a second time, after which the souls of the righteous enjoy the total spiritualized and eternal life in the world to come.

(Gillman 1997:160)

According to Bronner, Maimonides’ seeming preoccupation (and even preference) for the soul’s immortality was because it needed to be explained. By contrast, ‘bodily resurrection was a given, an irrefutable cornerstone of Judaism, a miracle he refused to deny’ (Bronner 2011:115). This would influence the later pioneers of modern Judaism, who appreciated Maimonides’ logical explanations, but did not hold fast to his articulation of faith. Between the medieval philosophers and the modern reformers, another voice emerged within Judaism.

Jewish mysticism, with its emphasis on Kabbalah, began in the late medieval period. This movement added a totally new dimension to the Jewish understanding of the afterlife. The biggest contribution, according to Gillman, ‘is their portrayal of the fate of the soul in the period between death and resurrection’ (Gillman 1997:176). In short, Jewish mysticism incorporated notions of reincarnation from eastern religions. Ironically, this fringe opinion may be found today in the most ultra-orthodox Jewish communities as well as among the most secular Jews.²

The modern Reform movement strongly reacted against the traditional view of resurrection. This would become one of the most divisive issues between the two groups. In an 1844 conference of Reform rabbis in Germany, Abraham Geiger strongly advocated for the position of immortality of the soul to be taught as official doctrine. Other conferences similarly rejected the idea of resurrection. Portions of the *Amidah* that referred to resurrection were changed. This culminated in the famous Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, which spelled out the Reform movement’s official position. It included the following words:

² For a survey of mystical Jewish beliefs about resurrections, see Raphael (2009).

We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness.

We reject as not rooted in Judaism the belief both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise), as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

(cited in Bronner 2011:157-158)

Gillman observes that resurrection is embraced by one group and rejected by the other for the same reason: 'They all understand it as a literal statement' (Gillman 1997:213). But, in more recent times – postmodernity – there have been some interesting changes among liberal Jews. Gillman alluded to this trend in 1997. Ten years after Gillman's book, the Reform Movement made a new decision that was documented in their updated prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*. The *Gevurot* section of the *Amidah* (the part which discusses resurrection) contains a change. The traditional phrase 'who revives the dead' (which was removed by Reform pioneers) has been added alongside their previous wording of 'who gives life to all'. This is a radical departure from Reform's official stance for over a century, 'thereby presenting the worshipper with two options' (Bronner 2011:161).

This change by the Reform movement seems indicative of a growing recognition that resurrection is a Jewish concept. More scholars are acknowledging its origin in the Tanakh and it is virtually a given when archaeology is added to the equation (Friedman & Overton 2001). The battle between resurrection and immortality of the soul intensified at the dawn of modernity, and there are a number of factors that lead to this (Petuchowsky 1983, Batnitzky 2009). One of these is specifically relevant for this study. Levenson wrote: 'In the context of Jewish-Christian disputation, the denial of resurrection can therefore be a patent weapon in the armamentarium of the Jewish disputants' (Levenson 2008:2).

3.4.3 Paul's view of resurrection

Between the Jewish and Greek views of resurrection stands the apostle Paul. This is seen most clearly in 1 Corinthians 15, his discussion of the type of body that is resurrected. The language used is unique and the exact nature of the new body has been the subject of much debate in the early and medieval church (Bynum 1995), as well as by modern commentators (Janssen 2000). The key issue, for our discussion here, concerns the slightly less daunting question of whether or not Jesus' resurrection was physical.

Some scholars have used this passage to explain that Paul described a non-physical resurrection. Therefore, it is argued, there is a discrepancy between Paul's words and

the gospel accounts of a physical resurrection. And since Paul's letters were written first, the Gospels must be discarded as accurate sources. The most comprehensive and creative use of this argument in this study comes from Alan F. Segal, from a forty-page chapter in his book, *Life after death*. His approach to this subject is original, and he employed new paradigms. Specifically, Segal places Paul in a thoroughly Jewish context.

Paul's understanding of the end of time is apocalyptic. He imminently expects the end. His grasp of the resurrection is firmly mystical but in the Jewish tradition, not the Greek one. He describes his spiritual experiences in terms appropriate to a Jewish apocalyptic-mystagogue of the first century.

(Segal 2004:402)

According to Segal, Paul's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus stems first and foremost from his own experiences. He was not a convert to Christianity. Rather, his transition was from a 'sophisticated and educated form of Judaism to a new, apocalyptic form of it' (Segal 2004:401). Key among Paul's experiences is his claim in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 that he (described in the third person) went up to heaven. In turn, Paul's experiences were modified and filled with new meaning, as 'Paul learned his Christianity from the community in Damascus' (Segal 2004:409). Yet this community, too, was already influenced to some extent by Jewish apocalyptic thought. What actually happened to Paul (in Segal's view) is explained through a humanistic lens and seen as a psychological/religious experience.

Modern science balks at the notion of physical transport to heaven, except in spaceships, whereas a heavenly journey in vision or trance is credible and understandable...When a heavenly journey is described literally, the cause may be literary convention or the belief of the voyager; but when reconstructing the actual experience, only one type can pass modern standards of credibility.

(Segal 2004:411)

Segal next wonders how such a journey could take place in Paul's mind without the Greek concept of a soul. He deduces that the body of the one who ascends and the body of the resurrected Christ must be the same. To prove this he brings in 1 Corinthians 15:44, where Paul speaks of a 'spiritual body' (Segal 2004:412). This concept will be addressed later in the Chapter, but is used here as a premise to make his current point. He is presuming here the very thing he will later attempt to prove. Next, Segal attempts to uncover a textual antecedent for Paul's theology of the afterlife. Along with other possibilities (Ezk 1 and 1 *En.*, Merkaba Mysticism), the best and most precise evidence comes from Dead Sea Scrolls document 4QMA, discovered by Morton Smith.

Smith's translations are careful and his reconstructions conservative. Along with the Angelic Liturgy this is now persuasive evidence that the mystics at the Dead Sea understood themselves to be one company with the angels, whom they call the *b'nei elohim*, which they must have achieved through some Sabbath rite of translation and transmutation.

(Segal 2004:414)

Segal interacts with an impressive amount of information from apocryphal works and the Dead Sea Scrolls. His argument rests largely on parallels to these works in Paul's writings about his own spiritual experiences. He admits, however, that much of this evidence is highly speculative, both from Paul and the alleged parallel traditions. The information from 2 Corinthians 12 is 'abstruse and esoteric' while our knowledge of ancient mysticism is 'meager' (Segal 2004:408).

Segal next explores the issue of transformation. Paul often expresses the plight of followers of Jesus as changed into the image of Jesus (Rm 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18). This is especially true when discussing the eternal state (Phlp 3:20-21). Most commentators, conservative or critical, agree that Paul is speaking of a radical change that takes place in the body at the resurrection. But, what is the nature of this change? Segal offers the following.

All of this suggests that the body of believers would be refashioned into the glorious body of Christ, a process which starts with conversion and faith but ends in the parousia, the shortly-expected culmination of history when Christ returns. It all depends on a notion of the body that is a new spiritualized substance, a new body which is not flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 15:42-50).

(Segal 2004:420)

Once again, Segal has assumed a certain interpretation based on 1 Corinthians 15:50 to make his case. This is the keystone to most of his points, and it functions as a sort of ace in the hole. It gives strength to arguments that he admits are not quite solid. But, it is only at the end of the chapter that he addresses this crucial passage. This is the topic we will turn to now.

In 1 Corinthians 15:37-50, Paul discusses the type of body that is resurrected. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 he uses an agricultural metaphor. The body that dies is sown a 'physical body' (*soma psychikon*), while a body that is raised is a 'spiritual body' (*soma pneumatikon*). These phrases, he says, do not go together in classic Platonism. Segal unpacks their meaning by appealing to Paul's worldview and his (Paul's) own personal experiences. Ultimately, Paul was 'trying to characterize his apocalyptic vision in a Hellenistic context'.

For Paul, life in its most basic sense, psychic life, was also bodily life. “Pneumatic,” spiritual life is bodily as well, though Paul immediately reiterated that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). The psychic body is the ordinary body (flesh and soul); the *soma pneumatikon* is the ordinary body subsumed and transformed by the spirit.

(Segal 2004:430)

The pivotal term ‘spiritual body’ is here explained as something ambiguous. It has undergone a transformation, to be sure, but Segal has not yet proved that such a change includes the absence of physicality. He does not speak of Paul’s use of these contrasting words elsewhere in the same epistle (1 Cor 2:14). Rather, he quickly points his readers to 1 Corinthians 15:50, where Paul says that ‘flesh and blood’ cannot inherit the Kingdom. His ultimate argument rests here, as it has also been used earlier to presuppose other theories. He now states his conclusion: ‘The body of the resurrection will not be flesh and blood’ (Segal 2004:430). Unfortunately, this term is not exegeted or explained anywhere in the article. It is simply taken at its presumed face value.

Two other scholars in this study defer to this belief. Cook does not give reasons for his conclusion, but it will be part of his overall case against the empty tomb (see § 4.2.5). Paula Fredriksen does not use this information for a subsequent argument, but writes the following.

Paul, whose testimony is late (some twenty years after these events) and admittedly secondhand (“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received”), teaches that the Risen Christ appeared in a *pneumatikon soma*, “a spiritual body.” Whatever this might be, Paul insists that this body was *not* flesh and blood.

(Fredriksen 1999:262; emphasis in the original)

The accusation that Paul’s testimony is late and secondhand puts a negative spin on the details. Also, as discussed above (§ 3.2.2), there is good evidence to suggest that Paul was simply passing on a tradition that probably started within a few years of the crucifixion. Other scholars have examined 1 Corinthians 15:50 more thoroughly and have reached a very different conclusion. This is not only the case with conservative Christian scholars (Gundry 1994:217; Fee 1987:795-806). At least two of the authors in this study agree that Paul believed in a physical resurrection of the dead for Jesus’ followers and therefore for Jesus himself. Jon D. Levenson (along with co-author Kevin Madigan), wrote the following:

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul puts forward a defense of the resurrection of the body that derives from Jewish apocalyptic literature.... Indeed, the very use of the image of “seeding” suggests organic growth and development; the plant is different from the seed, yet the former grows out of the latter, owing to the surpassing power of their divine

creator. The body that is sown is a physical body, “it is raised,” to be sure, “a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Nonetheless it is a body. We are not dealing here with the immortality or transmigration of the soul or anything else of that sort.

(Madigan & Levenson 2009:41)

Another important book comes from Claudia Setzer, who also studied Jewish and early Christian views of the resurrection of the body. One of her objectives was to determine how such beliefs were used as boundary markers. The importance of this lies in the ‘peculiar utility of resurrection as a symbol in the construction of community’ (Setzer 2004:4).

Regarding 1 Corinthians 15:50, she does not see the necessity for a body-soul dichotomy that is sometimes espoused: “Flesh and blood” then stands for a certain kind of bodily life that will not inherit the kingdom, but not a rejection of bodily resurrection’ (Setzer 2004:64). She does not attempt to explain how or why Paul believed in the resurrection. His reasons for including these passages in 1 Corinthians, she argues, had to do with overturning the ‘imperialistic bent’ of the current political rule. Paul was trying to ‘replace the old pyramid of patronage’ with ‘the crucified Jesus whom God raises in power’ (Setzer 2004:66). The event itself, however, was undeniably physical: ‘Paul could not have been clearer that only those who believe in resurrection of the body have truly understood Jesus’ resurrection’ (Setzer 2004:67).

3.4.4 Conclusion

Like many other issues in Judaism, resurrection has a long and diverse history. Jewish scholars are divided on the question about life after death. Materialists believe that when the body dies, the entire person ceases to exist. This presupposition would completely negate the possibility of resurrection (see § 3:1 above). Belief in the immortality of the soul also offers an alternative to resurrection. But, as demonstrated above, this view seems to be waning in both religious and scholarly Jewish circles. Neither of these two options can be stated dogmatically, and they should not be used to sidestep the study of the resurrection of Jesus.

For those who believe in the concept of resurrection, there is yet another obstacle. The traditional Jewish view, at least since Daniel 12:1-3, has been that a general resurrection of all the dead will occur at the end of time. This is usually intertwined with the role of the Messiah. For this reason, the individual resurrection of Jesus may seem to be a foreign idea. This was perhaps also a reason why many first century Jews were not convinced that he was the Messiah.

Martin Buber alluded to this. If the disciples had merely believed that Jesus would rise in the future with all of the dead, he wrote, ‘then perhaps a reformation of Judaism might have taken place, but certainly not a new religion’ (Buber 1951:99). Amy-Jill Levine made a similar case: ‘The problem was not the claim that Jesus had been raised; the problem was the claim that he *alone* had been raised. Although many expected the messiah would bring about a resurrection, a single resurrection did not prove messianic identity’ (Levine 2007:61).

This argument cuts both ways. The message of the earliest church was indeed unique and incredible. Some aspects of their faith were not expected. This raises the question of why anyone would have believed in the resurrection of Jesus at all. Surely, it was a minority of Jews who believed, but it was nonetheless a significant minority. It became a big enough movement to catch the attention of at least one religious Jew (from Tarsus), who sought to squash their growth. Either this was not a totally foreign belief, or if it was, the fact that any Jews believed argues for the fact that something extraordinary must have happened immediately after the crucifixion.

The New Testament does not present an alternative to the basic Jewish belief in an end-times resurrection of the dead. That resurrection is clearly mentioned throughout its pages. The two are not in competition. Traditional Judaism offers numerous possibilities regarding the relationship of the Messiah to the final resurrection. It is this question, the person and role of the Messiah, which ultimately needs to be addressed. This is the topic of the next Section.

3.5 THE MESSIAH

The role of the Messiah has a long and winding history in Jewish tradition. The word has meant different things at different times, and there is quite a bit of leeway regarding interpretation (Greenstone 1906, Silver 1927, Patai 1979, Schiffman 1987). In the popular mindset, a few characteristics have jumped to the forefront and dominated the discussion. These are, perhaps unsurprisingly, the very attributes that would distinguish the concept from the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus. Whatever else the Messiah may mean in Jewish tradition, the picture that most often emerges is one that automatically disqualifies Jesus. Joseph Telushkin explains the commonly held view.

The most basic reason for the Jewish denial of the messianic claims made on Jesus’ behalf is that he did not usher in world peace, as Isaiah prophesied: “And nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4). In addition, Jesus did not help bring about Jewish political sovereignty for the Jews or protection from their enemies.

(Telushkin 1991:546)

Because of this, any suggestion that Jesus may have risen from the dead becomes irrelevant in the Jewish world. If he does not fit the job description, the rest of his resume means very little. This remains one of the key reasons why Jewish scholars have been less interested in exploring the question of his resurrection. Dan Cohn Sherbok wrote the following.

For twenty centuries, however, Jews have steadfastly rejected the New Testament accounts of his survival after crucifixion. No doubt this was largely due to the Jewish unwillingness to grant Jesus Messianic status. After all, Jesus did not fulfill the traditional role of the Messiah.

(Cohn-Sherbok 1996:191)

In recent decades, New Testament scholarship has been increasingly recognizing the importance of the first century Jewish context. Longstanding assumptions about Judaism and Christianity are being re-evaluated. During the time of Jesus, there was no such thing as Jewish-Christian relations, at least not as it later came to be. This is an anachronistic approach. Jesus and his message are firmly planted in the soil of Second Temple Judaism. Paul's message as well needs to be understood in this light, and not based on the boundary markers of Judaism and Christianity as they developed centuries later. This has profound significance for questions about which views of the Messiah should be considered Jewish.

This Section will address three basic objections that are often used to disqualify Jesus as a potential messianic contender. Ever since Judaism and Christianity emerged as distinct entities, these issues have helped solidify the Jewish understanding of the Messiah, and have contributed to the adamant rejection of the New Testament's claims. Modern Jewish scholarship, however, has been discovering that some of these long entrenched positions are not nearly as ancient or binding as previously thought.

The first part of this Section will discuss the notion of pagan origins, the idea that the early movement (specifically Paul) borrowed from mystery religions and other non-Jewish sources to create a messianic figure that would die and rise again. The next two Sections address the attributes of Jesus, as expressed in the New Testament, that are considered most irreconcilable with Judaism: the role and the nature of the messiah.

3.5.1 Pagan Messiah

The most basic characteristic of the Messiah is that he must be a Jew. In this respect, virtually all scholars would agree that Jesus fits the bill. Only those who have a perverse disposition to say otherwise would disagree (Heschel 2008). But, whether or not the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus fits into a Jewish framework is a completely different question. A popular argument in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth

century says that Paul created Christianity by adding pagan elements to the original Jewish message of Jesus.

Jewish scholars picked up on this, as seen in the pioneering work of Graetz and others who will be surveyed in Chapter 4. This view allowed scholars to accept Jesus as a Jew, while keeping Paul and 'Christianity' at a distance. Paul's Jewishness was often considered suspect at best. This would reach its apex in the writings of Hyam Maccoby in the 1980s. According to him, Paul not only borrowed from paganism, he was thoroughly immersed in it. The title of Maccoby's most provocative book leaves no question as to his perspective: *The mythmaker, Paul and the invention of Christianity*. Whereas Jesus was a Pharisaic rabbi, he argues, Paul was something altogether different. His position is summarized as follows.

Paul was never a Pharisee rabbi, but was an adventurer of undistinguished background. He was attached to the Sadducees, as a police officer under the authority of the High Priest, before his conversion to belief in Jesus. His mastery of the kind of learning associated with the Pharisees was not great. He deliberately misrepresented his own biography in order to increase the effectiveness of his missionary activity.

(Maccoby 1986:15)

Maccoby relies heavily on the fourth century writer, Epiphanius, who cited the Ebionites as saying that 'Paul had no Pharisaic background or training' (Maccoby 1986:17). Maccoby will continue down this road and make an even stronger case. Paul's theology, specifically about atonement, was borrowed from both Gnosticism and the mystery religions (Maccoby 1986:16). These would be intermingled with verses from traditional Jewish scripture. Paul's letters are used to validate this claim. 'There is nothing in Paul's writing to prove that he was a Pharisee,' he writes, 'and much to prove that he was not' (Maccoby 1986:71).

Paul's very identity is questioned as well. Again following the Ebionites, Paul was a convert to Judaism, took the name Saul, and 'invented' his genealogy of being from the tribe of Benjamin. This was a 'sheer bluff', which gentle converts would not be able to confirm or deny. Paul's parents were actually Gentiles who never fully converted to Judaism (Maccoby 1986:96). They were God-fearers, and because of this Paul did have some instruction in Judaism when he was young. Later in life he attempted to live as a Pharisee. He failed at this, becoming only 'a member of the High Priest's band of armed thugs' (Maccoby 1986:99). This biographical information is key to understanding Paul's metamorphosis. Paul's Damascus experience, then, is 'psychologically and socially understandable' (Maccoby 1986:95) when these facts are recognized. Paul's experiences, both religious and psychological, would shape his theology. This is especially true of his view of the resurrection of Jesus.

In his vivid imagination, the sacred history of the Hebrew Bible (in its Greek translation, the Septuagint) with its heroes and prophets jostles with memories of the sacred procession of the mystery god Baal-Taraz, the dying and resurrected deity who gave Tarsus its name.

(Maccoby 1986:100)

It is not surprising that Christian scholars found this theory difficult to embrace. John T. Pawlikowski thought it had too much conjecture and too little evidence supporting it. 'His rather psychological description of the Damascus-road conversion sounds as though Maccoby was a personal confidant of Paul', he wrote, 'Thus, this volume cannot be accepted as a serious scholarly contribution' (Pawlikowski 1986:1041). Jewish scholars were critical as well. Ellis Rivkin wrote the following:

But Maccoby's evidence is hard to take seriously. It rests on an account of Paul by a fourth-century chronicler, Parharius, who drew his portrait of Paul from a hostile Ebionite source – a source which Maccoby, himself, admits is wholly unreliable. To sweep away Paul's own impassioned listing of his Pharisaic bona-fides in favor of a fourth-century disfigurement is thus to fly in the face of sound critical scholarship and simple common sense.

(Rivkin 1989:226)

In his next book, *Paul and Hellenism*, Maccoby continues where he left off. All of Paul's theology is given pagan origins. The death of Jesus as a means of salvation, for example, was prefigured in the stories about Dionysus, Osiris, Adonis, Attis and Orpheus (Maccoby 1991:65). His main point was to show how antithetical all of this is to true Judaism. But, this line of reasoning was already waning even amongst critical scholars by the time Maccoby wrote. Amy-Jill Levine thought his views were too one sided. She acknowledges the possibility of some pagan influence in Paul's writing. Contemporary Jewish texts offer the 'building blocks' for some of these ideas as well. 'Moreover', she continues, 'that Jews would have accepted Jesus as their Messiah, suggests that such Christological claims were not entirely alien to their world view' (Levine 1995:231). Alan Segal's response was more direct.

It is difficult to show that any mystery religion directly worshipping a dying and reviving God, whose death is salvific, predates Christianity. We have few texts that can be identified as using mystery vocabulary.... It is clear that Maccoby concentrates on this long abandoned aspect of Pauline research to further his polemic against Christianity.

(Segal 1991:143)

In the wider arena of New Testament scholarship, the pagan Paul was becoming an increasingly anachronistic figure. Contemporary Pauline scholarship makes a point of placing him in the context of Second Temple Judaism. Books by Krister Stendahl and

E.P. Sanders are credited with pioneering this wave. What emerged is known as *The New Perspective on Paul*. It presents a radically new paradigm that has branched out in several directions. The recognition of his Jewishness has been an important step for scholarship all around, although some of the key nuances have been greatly challenged (Carson *et al.* 2004; Bird 2007; Allman 2013).

The specifically Jewish scholarship on Paul has been diverse as well. In the last twenty years, there has been a new understanding and appreciation of his Jewishness. At the same time, accusations about pagan origins remain. Both views are represented, but there does seem to be a pattern. Those who are doing groundbreaking and extensive scholarly work on Paul's theology (see Segal, Boyarin, Nanos and Eisenbaum) have been concluding that it can only be understood in a thoroughly Jewish context. Conversely, those who maintain belief in pagan influences for Paul are usually writing more overtly polemical or popular works, where Maccoby remains the authority.

David Klinghoffer is one example of this latter category. He first notices the verses that affirm Paul's Jewishness (Ac 22:3, Phlp 3:5-6) and wonders why Paul felt the need to be so insistent. He writes: 'What does this Pharisee of Pharisees, this Hebrew of Hebrews, feel he needs to prove, and why' (Klinghoffer 2005:95)? In the following pages, Klinghoffer questions Paul's upbringing in Tarsus, his ancestral connection to the tribe of Benjamin and his ability to read Hebrew (Klinghoffer 2005:96). Paul's theology is also exposed as non-Jewish. But, this is not just his opinion. Klinghoffer makes reference to Epiphanius, the one who documented the Ebionites' view that Paul was not Jewish. The footnote (Klinghoffer 2005:231, n. 73) cites Maccoby's book *The mythmaker* as the source. Klinghoffer continues, saying that no one ever doubted Jesus' Jewishness, but the Epiphanius passage indicates that Jews who observed the commandments (meaning the Ebionites) 'found something suspect about Paul's Jewishness' (Klinghoffer 2005:115).

Shmueli Boteach's bestselling book continued in the same vein. His view of Jesus is 'profoundly shaped' by Maccoby (Boteach 2012:xi), whose name is frequently cited. For example: 'It is even possible, as Hyam Maccoby maintains, that Paul was not born Jewish but converted' (Boteach 2012:117). Michael Cook, however, relies less on Maccoby but nevertheless attributes pagan influences to Paul's theology. Cultic lords such as Mithras, Osiris, Tammuz, Attis and Adonis, and especially the concept of 'springtime-resurrections', were foundational to the new movement (Cook 2008:36). He writes,

Christianity, interweaving its Jesus story with such pagan motifs, adopted the even more extraordinary changing of a sacrificial victim from an animal to that of a God-man, and

commenced this story with an incarnation whereby God became that man, and through sacraments led initiates to become one with God.

(Cook 2008:37)

The Jewish reclamation of Paul is a work in progress. In the popular imagination, his writings are more likely to be labeled pagan than Jewish. This makes it easy to dismiss the resurrection as borrowed mythology, rather than a potential historical event that may be analyzed. But, among scholars, such notions are largely a thing of the past. Those who choose to defend the pagan view can no longer accept it as a given. It must be either defended in light of recent scholarship or abandoned.

3.5.2 Dying Messiah

The notion of a suffering and dying messiah has a unique place in Jewish history. A new round of debate erupted from the ranks of the Chabad movement of Hassidic Judaism. Their leader, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, had been rumored to be the Messiah. His death in 1994 did not cancel this belief, and in fact the movement continued to grow (Heilman & Friedman 2010). Even today – twenty years later – his picture is posted all over Israel, as many believe he is the messiah. While there does not seem to be any definitive theology, at least some in the movement are hoping for his return from the dead. For many, this claim goes well beyond the boundaries of acceptable Jewish belief. Orthodox Rabbi, David Berger, was outraged at both the claim itself and the fact that other religious Jews were not more concerned. He said that ‘there is no more fundamental messianic belief in Judaism than the conviction that the Davidic Messiah who appears at the end of days will not die before completing his mission’ (Berger 2001:11,12).

This brings us to Isaiah 53, the most heavily disputed passage in the Jewish-Christian debate. Several places in the New Testament cite it as pointing to Jesus. Traditional Judaism has had mixed interpretations. The two dominant views are that it speaks of the messiah and that it speaks metaphorically about the nation of Israel as a whole. The messianic interpretation appears early in the rabbinic period, in the Talmud and Midrashim, and the national interpretation does not appear in a Jewish text until several centuries later. The history of these competing views has been well rehearsed (Driver & Neubauer 1969; Bellinger & Farmer 1998; Stuhlmacher & Janowski 2004; Bock & Glaser 2012).

Joel E. Rembaum documented the shifting nature of these interpretations in a 1982 article in *Harvard Theological Review*. He wanted to demonstrate that Jewish interpretation was not only influenced by aspects of the Christian view, but that Jewish interpretations incorporated Christian themes, re-tuned, into their exegesis. The rabbinic literature on Isaiah 53 is limited compared with the volumes written in the Middle Ages.

This, he says, had more to do with the types of commentaries that were written in each period. But, the content was undeniable: 'The servant as messiah is the dominant theme in the rabbinic sources' (Rembaum 1982:291). Ironically, the first documented reference of Isaiah 53 as possibly referring to the nation of Israel comes from a Christian source and not a Jewish one. The Church Father, Origin, writing in the early third century, mentioned this as a Jewish objection to the messiahship of Jesus (Rembaum 1982:292).

Rembaum sees three factors that led to Judaism's shift away from the messianic interpretation and towards the national interpretation. The first was a response to Christian propaganda that said that the exile is punishment. This created the Jewish belief that in exile the Jews were actually functioning as a 'light to the nations'. The second was in response to Christian missionizing. Because of this, most Jews responded by 'avoiding the messianic interpretation altogether'. The third was in response to the Crusades. In the midst of the terrible situation, Isaiah 53 came to be seen as the Jewish people, whose suffering 'was part of the divine plan'. Rashi, in the eleventh century, made use of these factors and incorporate them into his commentary of Isaiah 53 (Rembaum 1982:292-5).

After Rashi, most commentators offered similar ideas at least until the modern period. Rembaum cites A. Funkenstein, who suggested three themes that developed in those years regarding the national interpretation. These include the 'cathartic', which refers to expiating Israel's own sins. Next is the 'missionary', which sees the exile as a means of bringing the Torah to all nations. Finally, there is the 'soteriological', which sees Israel's suffering as providing atonement for the nations (Rembaum 1982:299-300).

Something new began with Heinrich Graetz in the nineteenth century. He continued some of these basic themes but added an additional layer. He incorporated classic Christological themes and applied them to the Jewish experience. These include 'messiahship, the crown of thorns, and the idea of resurrection' (Rembaum 1982:308). By so doing he included the more broad ideas of justice, mercy and morality (Rembaum 1982:310). Rembaum concludes the following:

The continuous interfacing between Judaism and Christianity has resulted in a constant process of ideological cross-fertilization. Through this process, an idea gleaned from the rival tradition has served to reinvigorate and perpetuate the rivalry. The Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 53 surveyed above, with their emphasis on universally efficacious, vicarious suffering and atonement, exemplify this ironic fact of history.

(Rembaum 1982:310)

The idea that Rashi was the first Jewish commentator to offer the national interpretation has since been challenged. A few texts have been uncovered which push the date back at least a couple of hundred years. According to Horowitz, these include 'Hebrew liturgical poems composed in Italy' which may have influenced Rashi, and one 'Arabic biblical commentary composed in the Middle East' (Horowitz 2012:434). But, these additional manuscripts do little to change the argument. The messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 is still found in the earliest and most authoritative Jewish texts.

It is simply not accurate to say that a suffering and dying messiah has no place in Judaism. But, this does raise some other questions. Namely, how does such a messiah relate to the passages in the Tanakh that speak of a messiah ushering in world peace? The rabbis dealt with this as well. They saw two main pictures of the messiah described throughout the Tanakh. One picture reveals a suffering servant (Is 53) who would come lowly, riding on a donkey (Zch 9:9). The other reveals a conquering hero (Dn 7:13) who would ultimately bring world peace (Is 2:4). Because of this, the rabbis developed the idea of two Messiahs, known as 'The Messiah ben Joseph' and the 'Messiah ben David'. The Messiah ben Joseph would die, and there are various accompanying traditions (Mitchell 2005, 2007, 2009; Schafer 2012:236-271).

The writers of the New Testament also understood two pictures of the messiah in the Tanakh. Jesus came first as the suffering servant, and promised to return as the conquering hero. Some object to this on the grounds that a 'second coming' is not mentioned in the Tanakh. But, in response, the rabbinic concept of two different messiahs is not mentioned either. There are numerous rabbinic traditions about the timing and the relationship between the messiah and the final resurrection. To argue that the New Testament's picture of Jesus differs from that of traditional Judaism begs the question of which rabbinic view is meant. This may still be contested among the Jewish community at large, but scholars know otherwise. As Daniel Boyarin wrote, the national interpretation of Isaiah 53 has not been the dominant one: 'Quite the contrary, we now know that many Jewish authorities, maybe even most, until nearly the modern period have read Isaiah 53 as being about the Messiah; until the last few centuries, the allegorical interpretation was a minority' (Boyarin 2012:152).

Exactly how this new scholarly concession will affect the Jewish study of Jesus is unclear. It does not mean that Jesus is the Messiah any more than it means that Menachem Schneerson is the messiah. But, it does obliterate a common obstacle. This may cause some scholars to be more comfortable with the New Testament's claims about the death and resurrection of Jesus, and lead to a new surge in scholarship in this area. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of a dying Messiah within Judaism might simply produce *different* reasons to dismiss the candidacy of Jesus.

Israel Knohl of Hebrew University has written about newly discovered texts that perhaps originated in the generation before Jesus. In 2000, he wrote *The messiah before Jesus: The suffering servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. He argued that Jesus really did regard himself as the messiah, and that he also expected to be rejected, killed and resurrected after three days, based on previous Jewish ideas found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nine years later, he wrote, *The Gabriel Revelation*, which was the name of an apocalyptic text written at the turn of the first century. It also speaks of dying and a resurrection after three days. The discovery, he wrote, was dramatic, and would 'change the way we view the historical Jesus and the birth of Christianity' (Knohl 2009:xi).

For our purposes here, what is important is how Knohl uses this information in relation to the historical Jesus. With minimal interaction with either the New Testament or the historical Jesus, Knohl explains what happened. On his last night on earth, 'the inner struggle within Jesus' soul reached a climax' (Knohl 2009:93). He pleaded with God, but ultimately chose to stay on course. He 'opted to stay in Jerusalem and follow the path of suffering, death and resurrection on the third day, a messianic path devised in *The Gabriel Revelation*' (Knohl 2009:93). There his book ends. The point here is that both those who deny a dying messiah in Judaism and those who affirm it, may each have their own way of dismissing the resurrection of Jesus.

3.5.3 Divine Messiah

The most definitive theological boundary marker between Judaism and Christianity is the incarnation, and the related concept of the trinity. The claim that Jesus is both human and divine is, for many, a deal breaker in the attempt to harmonize the two traditions. Like the concept of a dying messiah, it provides a convenient response to the resurrection. Maccoby wrote: 'Since there is no precedent in Judaism for a deity who dies, there can be no precedent for a deity who is resurrected' (Maccoby 1991:69).

But, recent scholarship has brought unexpected light to this discussion as well. A number of Christian scholars have studied the boundaries of monotheism in the first century in an attempt to better understand the New Testament's claims (Hengel 1976; Newman *et al.* 1999; Hurtado 2005; Bauckham 2008a). Jewish scholars have also addressed the question, usually in the context of Jewish-Christian relations (see Katz 1971; Neusner 1988b; Redman 1994; Goshen-Gottstein 2002; Wolf 2002; Kister 2006).

Three Jewish scholars in particular have offered remarkably positive studies of the incarnation in relationship to Jesus, concluding that the concept is not foreign to Judaism. They will be discussed here. Interestingly, they represent three different fields of study. These include philosophy, Tanakh, and Second Temple Judaism. It is also interesting to note the reasons why Jesus remains a non-option for these scholars,

despite reclaiming such a polemical issue as the incarnation. For two of the authors, the resurrection is a factor.

Michael Wyschogrod has studied the incarnation more than most other Jewish scholars (Wyschogrod 1986, 1993). He approaches it as a modern orthodox Jew and as a participant in Jewish-Christian dialogue. His main theological grid concerns God's election and indwelling with Israel. This covers virtually all areas of his theology, as seen in his classic work *The body of faith* (1983). The article that will be surveyed here specifically addresses the incarnation and its potential relevance for Judaism.

Because of the other factors of the Jewish-Christian debate, Judaism 'has never really investigated this issue soberly' (Wyschogrod 1996:198). Wyschogrod boldly seeks to evaluate the incarnation on its own terms and not through the lens of 'two thousand years of tragic history' (Wyschogrod 1996:198). He begins by stating that Jewish hostility to Jesus began over the issues of Messiahship and the Law. On top of these already thorny issues, the divinity of Jesus changed the debate dramatically, elevating it over the years from 'reservations' to 'absolute rift' (Wyschogrod 1996:199).

He cites two common Jewish responses to the divinity of Jesus. The first is biblical, and includes the problem of idolatry. This is subdivided into two parts. Idolatry may take the form of serving other gods. This means spiritual beings that had supernatural power, although inferior to the One true God of Abraham. Idolatry may also appear in what Wyschogrod terms the 'sticks and stones' dimension. This refers to attributing divinity to material objects, such as the golden calves (Wyschogrod 1996:200).

The second response is philosophical. This brings the discussion to Maimonides, who was particularly weary of assigning any corporeal attributes to God. It is because God is absolute that Maimonides strongly rejected the idea of corporeal attributes. He did notice a number of examples in the Tanakh that present the corporeal attributes of God, but these he believed should not be interpreted literally. In fact, he said that those who attribute corporeality to God are heretics. In contradiction to this, Wyschogrod affirms that the Bible does assign corporeal attributes to God. As examples, he refers to passages where God dwells in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple and Jerusalem (Wyschogrod 1996:203)

The God of Israel is therefore both transcendent and active in our world. Such a belief helps bridge the gap between Judaism and Christianity, at least in terms of possibilities. Wyschogrod does not rule out Christianity's claim of incarnation. It is not something that can be negated by Biblical or logical principles.

If we can determine a priori that God could not appear in the form of a man or, to put it in more Docetistic terms, that there could never be a being who is both fully God and fully human, then we are substituting a philosophical scheme for the sovereignty of God. No Biblically oriented, responsible Jewish theologian can accept such a substitution of an ontological structure for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose actions humanity cannot predict and whose actions are not subject to an overreaching logical necessity to which they must conform.

(Wyschogrod 1996:204)

This understanding, Wyschogrod realizes, may appear to have ‘diminished’ the differences between Judaism and Christianity. But, this is not necessarily the case. He continues: ‘The fact remains that Judaism did not encounter Jesus either as the Messiah or as God and therefore a difference remains about what God did do even if not about what God could have done’ (Wyschogrod 1996: 205).

Having said this, the reader might expect a discussion of what actually happened, or whether or not an incarnation, which could happen, actually did happen in the person of Jesus. But, Wyschogrod does not enter that discussion. Instead, he focuses on the Jewish rejection of Jesus. He is viewing the issue through the lens of ecclesiology. Jews and Gentiles interpret things differently. The ‘Gentile Christianity’ that became the dominant, and then only, branch of the church, he writes, had neglected a prominent aspect of theology, namely the election of Israel. Wyschogrod acknowledges that Paul spoke of this in Romans 9-11, and that Jesus originally preached to his own Jewish people. He argues that ‘Jesus must not be separated from the Jewish people because he did not wish to separate himself from them’ (Wyschogrod 1996:206).

He then proposes that Christian theology must rethink its view of the Jewish people. Traditionally, the Church has held two basic views on this topic. The dominant one has been supercessionism, which says that the Church is the new Israel. The other view is based on Romans 9-11 and says that Israel has not lost its national election. Wyschogrod argues that this view would necessitate that ‘Jewish Christians retain their identity’ (Wyschogrod 1996:207). This is not necessarily his endorsement of Messianic Jews, but a point stressing consistency to the New Testament’s message.

The incarnation is ultimately placed within this matrix of Jewish-Christian relations. Jesus was a Jewish man, but he was also more than that. In Wyschogrod’s words, ‘The church found God in this Jewish flesh’ (Wyschogrod 1996:207). This was possible, he says, because God dwells in all Jewish flesh, based on Israel’s covenant and election. Perhaps, he continues to ponder, ‘the church’ was not able to recognize God dwelling in the midst of all Israel, but was somehow able to recognize God dwelling in this one individual Jew (Wyschogrod 1996:207). Wyschogrod’s understanding of God dwelling in Jesus may not be quite the same as the New Testament’s, but it is nevertheless an

important step coming from an orthodox Jewish scholar. For him, it seems to be a given that Jews should not believe in Jesus, but the incarnation is not a factor in this rejection.

Another profoundly important work on the subject comes from Benjamin Sommer, professor of Bible and ancient Semitic Languages at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. This credential places him fully within both the mainstream of Jewish thought, and the highest level of scholarship. His book is a major challenge to the traditional Jewish understanding of monotheism, as expressed in the opening statement: 'The God of the Hebrew Bible has a body, this must be stated at the outset, because so many people, including many scholars, assume otherwise' (Sommer 2009:1).

He sees evidence for his thesis throughout the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). Some of these passages 'point toward a non-material anthropomorphism', he says, but 'others reflect a more concrete conception of God's body' (Sommer 2009:2). The fact that God cannot be seen is often taken to mean He has no body. But, he argues, Exodus 33:20 says that no one can see God and live. This does not mean that God has no physical form (Sommer 2009:3). There are also references that explicitly say that God was seen (Is 6:1, 5; Am 9:1; Gn 3:8-9; Ex 33:11). Many scholars tend to avoid, or at best, downplay such passages. It is a common problem: 'the habit of assuming that because we all know the Hebrew Bible's God has no body, evidence to the contrary must be denied or, if that is not possible, explained away' (Sommer: 2009:5).

Sommer defines body as 'something located in a particular place at a particular time, whatever its shape or substance' (Sommer 2009: 80). Common words found in the Scriptures, such as glory (*kavod*) and name (*shem*) provide unique opportunities to explain God dwelling among His people (Sommer 2009:58-60). The Tabernacle and the Temple, are also obvious examples of this. Later, in the rabbinic period, the notion of the *Shekhinah* is employed to suggest 'something resembling the multiplicity of divine embodiment' (Sommer 2009:127). Jewish mysticism adds to the discussion as well. The concept of the *sephirot* in Kabbalah reveals that 'the divine can fragment itself into multiple selves that nonetheless remain parts of a unified whole' (Sommer 2009:129).

At the end of the book he approaches practical considerations, including the relationship of all this with Christianity. Despite all that has been said so far, his ultimate stance is quite traditional. Jews, he says, should repudiate Christianity because it includes a commitment to one who has been deemed by Judaism as a false messiah (Sommer 2009:135). As with Wyschogrod, the big problem is not the incarnation per se. It is the further step of Christianity's 'revival of a dying and rising god, a category ancient Israel rejects' (Sommer 2009:136). But, this seems just as dismissive as the people he argued

against (above) who dismissed the incarnation because of what is commonly assumed. Even if parallels are found (see Sandmel 1962), it needs to be demonstrated that Israelite rejection was based on the concept of resurrection itself, or simply because these other deities were, in fact, pagan examples of this. This is important given the fact that Sommer places the incarnation of Jesus in purely Jewish terms, while rejecting forms of incarnation that exist in pagan literature.

Again, the incarnation in itself is not the problem for him. God is able to be in more than one place at a time. 'That a deity came down did not mean the deity did not remain up,' He writes. 'The presence of God and of God-as-Jesus on earth is nothing more than a particular form of this old idea of multiple embodiment' (Sommer 2009:133). He writes: 'No Jew sensitive to Judaism's own classical sources, however, can fault the theological model Christianity employs when it avows belief in a God who has an earthly body as well as a Holy Spirit and a heavenly manifestation, for that model, we have seen, is a perfectly Jewish one' (Sommer 2009:135).

Daniel Boyarin has also studied the boundaries of monotheism. He wrote of the logos concept in his book, *Borderlines*. A few years later, he continued his study of first century Jewish beliefs in the book, *The Jewish Gospels*. Jesus was a Jewish man, virtually everyone agrees on this. Boyarin attempted to go beyond this commonly held view and enter a more daring thesis. He writes: 'I wish us to see that Christ too – the Divine Messiah – is a Jew. Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not – until much later – an anti-Jewish discourse at all' (Boyarin 2012:6).

He begins with some definitions. While many people have assumed 'Son of God' was a reference to divinity and 'Son of man' a reference to humanity, Boyarin turns this on its head. The former term actually indicates Jesus as the King Messiah, the latter one is a reference to divinity (Boyarin 2012:26). Daniel 7 is an important antecedent for the use of this term, as is *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*, each of these and their parallels to the Gospels is discussed in detail.

Throughout the book he addresses theology and takes many of the New Testament claims at face value. He does not affirm or deny historical claims, until the final few pages. At this point, the resurrection becomes an issue. He first says that the resurrection 'seems to me so unlikely as to be incredible' (Boyarin 2012:159). In his view, the resurrection and the disciples' experiences are not what actually happened (Boyarin 2012:160). However, in the spirit of ecumenicism, he does not want to invalidate the faith of others who believe this. He therefore adds the following in a footnote: 'Let me make myself clear here: I am not denying the validity of the religious

Christian view of matters. That is surely a matter of faith, not scholarship. I am denying it as a historical, scholarly, critical explanation' (Boyarin 2012: 160).

Perhaps some of Jesus' followers, he writes, 'saw him arisen'. But this 'must be' because they had a narrative that caused that expectation. Jesus fulfills the role of both the divine figure from Daniel and the Messianic King. The real Jesus – prophet, magician, charismatic teacher – was transformed by the belief, whether his own or that of the people, that he was the coming one. Boyarin concludes:

Details of his life, his prerogatives, his powers, and even his suffering and death before triumph are all developed out of close midrashic reading of the biblical materials and fulfilled in his life and death. The exaltation and resurrection experiences of his followers are a product of the narrative, not a cause of it.

(Boyarin 2012:160)

3.5.4 Conclusion

The belief that Jesus' resurrection is either borrowed from or inspired by pagan mythology is simply outdated. Comparisons to rabbinic literature – for the purpose of negation – also fall short. The concept of a dying messiah is one of many options found in rabbinic literature. There is something else to consider. Both the pagan and rabbinic views about resurrection are theoretical. They describe concepts, or possibilities. Jesus, on the other hand, was a historical figure. His original followers believed that he rose from the dead, as have millions of people throughout the last two thousand years. The question, therefore, is not whether this claim qualifies as 'Jewish', but whether or not it happened.

The incarnation presents a different challenge. It likewise does not change the historical reality of whether or not Jesus rose from the dead, but it remains an obstacle. It is still considered the epitome of a non-Jewish idea. Based on the pre-imminence of the *Shma* (Dt 6:4), any perceived threat to monotheism is the most serious of all charges. The New Testament does not speak against this. In fact, in Mark 12:28-29, Jesus says that the *Shma* is the greatest commandment of all. But, it is much more than a theological issue. Jews who deny God are still part of the fold, while Jews who embrace Jesus are not. It is the supreme boundary marker (Novak 1991).

The last century has seen radical changes in both Jewish and Christian understandings of many things. The now obvious fact that Jesus was a Jew was once nothing short of scandalous (Levine 2007). Views about pagan influences on Paul, or the Jewishness of a dying messiah, have radically changed (at least in scholarly circles) in recent years as well. Whether or not the new, pioneering work on the boundaries of Jewish monotheism will one day be in a similar category remains to be seen. The Jewish scholarship in this

area cited above is in its infancy. For now, it may still easily be brushed aside as a novelty or an oddity, given the overwhelming historic position on this issue in the Jewish community.

But, that would be unfortunate. Sommer's work on the Tanakh is groundbreaking and nothing less than paradigm shifting. Boyarin's work will specifically be of interest to Jewish New Testament scholars. But, its importance is not necessarily because of his specific conclusions. A number of these may be challenged (see Schafer 2012b). Rather, his willingness to follow the evidence even when it goes beyond the traditional boundaries is not only commendable, it is absolutely vital for the advancement of scholarship itself. As Eisenbaum concluded in her review of Boyarin's book, 'the opportunity to acknowledge overlap and resonance with another faith once conceived in diametrical opposition would not be a bad thing' (Eisenbaum 2012)

3.6 DUAL COVENANT THEOLOGIES

There were two factors in the twentieth century that permanently altered the nature of Jewish-Christian relations. The first was the Holocaust (Smith 2006). After the horrors of the Second World War and the death of six million Jews, the Church needed to reevaluate its position on the Jewish people. Supersessionism was the dominant position at least since the second century. The new dilemma concerned how to validate and uphold the uniqueness of Jesus, and at the same time affirm God's unique relationship with Israel. A number of Christian theologians offered new paradigms.³

Jewish scholars dealt with this as well. Franz Rosenzweig's book, *The star of redemption*, was first published in 1939 (Rosenzweig 1971), but would take on a new vitality after the Holocaust. It advocated a two-covenant approach, meaning that Judaism and Christianity are separate but equal paths provided by the same God. Something similar was actually proposed by Maimonides about 800 years earlier, and also by the eighteenth century rabbi, Jacob Emden (see Falk 1982). Modern variations of this will be discussed below.

The second factor that has altered Jewish-Christian relations is the recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus. Toward the end of the century, both Jewish and Christian scholars began to approach the New Testament with a new and profound awareness of the importance of its Jewish context. This, however, also presents a challenge to those seeking a two-covenant solution to the dilemma. The more Jesus – and Paul – are acknowledged as (good) Jews, the more difficult it becomes to say that Jesus has nothing to do with the Jewish people.

³ For a survey of these new paradigms, see Soulen (1996).

This Section will survey the attempts to deal with these issues. The resurrection of Jesus is particularly relevant to this discussion, as it is not merely a theoretical idea that may be believed by one group and not the other. It is an event which either happened or it did not, and it often has a unique role in the midst of two-covenant proposals. The first part of this Section will examine pluralistic formulas put forth by three modern Jewish thinkers; an Orthodox rabbi, a Conservative rabbi and a Reform rabbi respectively. The second part will address Jewish views of a key verse in the discussion, Romans 11:26. The final part will examine alternatives to the efficacy of the resurrection as stated in the New Testament.

3.6.1 Modern proposals

Irving 'Yitz' Greenberg has been on the forefront of the Jewish-Christian dialogue movement for many years. A modern Orthodox Rabbi and professor, his views have challenged both liberals and conservatives, both Jewish and Christian. His book, *For the sake of heaven and earth*, is a collection of his essays on Judaism and Christianity that span four decades.⁴ He shows respect for Christianity and has sought to find a positive place for it, while maintaining Jewish distinctives.

While some Jews have called Jesus a 'false messiah', Greenberg prefers the term 'failed messiah'. The difference is that '[a] failed Messiah is one who has the right values and upholds the covenant, but does not attain the goal' (Greenberg 2004:153). Greenberg sees a place for Jesus in line with Jewish history and Jewish teaching. It is through the lens of God's covenant with Israel that he will make his case. First, God chose Abraham and his descendants. At Sinai, God gave further revelation and created a nation. After that, additional revelation was given and a new group was formed. 'The group that would bring the message of redemption to the rest of the nations had to grow out of the family and covenanted community of Israel' (Greenberg 2004:221). Christianity, then, is both an offshoot and a continuation of God's covenant with Israel. It is acceptable for Gentiles.

But, in what way did Jesus fail? For Greenberg, and most traditional Jews, the Messiah will be recognized by the changes he brings. These include overcoming sickness, poverty and oppression, along with re-establishing 'political, economic and social structures' that 'support and nurture the perfection of life' (Greenberg 2004:147). Greenberg is nonetheless conciliatory. Although Jesus did not finish the job, 'his work is not in vain' (Greenberg 2004:177). He is then compared with other great figures in Jewish history. Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah had their failures but were clearly part of God's plan.

⁴ The articles will be treated as one coherent unit here.

Greenberg draws a more direct parallel between Jesus and the Messiah ben Joseph of Rabbinic tradition (discussed above). This figure is a good example of a 'failed but true messiah'. The Messiah ben Joseph comes first and eventually dies. He paves the way for the Messiah ben David who will bring about the 'final restoration' (Greenberg 2004:153, see also Sherwin 1994). But, as many would argue (see e.g., Maggid 2011:265), the death of the Messiah ben Joseph is not in fact a failure. It is an act of completion, ordained by God, which leads to the coming of the Messiah ben David. In the same vein, others would argue, the death of Jesus should not automatically be labeled a failure (at least not without interacting with the resurrection and its implications).

Greenberg writes almost nothing about the historical Jesus. It is beyond his scope of interest. He is more concerned with the relationship between the two religious groups. Jesus is deemed a failure because he did not do what Orthodox Judaism expected, at least not in the proper timetable. This raises the question of what Jesus actually did, or why anyone should follow him at all. According to Greenberg, God literally spoke to and called Abraham. The Exodus, too, was a real historical event. The next revelation must also have a historical basis. 'Christianity is a commentary on the original Exodus, in which the later event – the Christ event – is a manifest, "biblically" ordained miraculous event' (Greenberg 2004:156).

But, what exactly is the 'Christ event' mentioned here? Something important must have happened. In one of his only statements on the historical Jesus, he offers the following words.

Then they received another, activating signal: an empty tomb. The fact that Jesus did not even attain the minimal dignity of a final resting place – an undisturbed grave – should have been the final nail in the crucifixion of their faith. Instead they increased hope and trust in God. Soon they experienced the same (or greater) presence in their midst as before. Once faith supplied the key of understanding, the empty tomb yielded the message of the resurrection. Whether they received this message within three days, as the Gospel story indicates, or within three decades, as the most probable scholarly account has it, is of secondary importance.

(Greenberg 2004:222)

Greenberg is not concerned with historical details (although for good measure he alludes to the theory that says the empty tomb account was a later invention rather than a historical reality). For him, it is irrelevant whether or not the resurrection actually happened, since this does not fit into his scheme of Jesus as a failed messiah. But, this orientation has consequences for Jewish-Christian dialogue, the very thing Greenberg set out to accomplish. For most Christians (along with Paul in 1 Cor 15:17), the resurrection is the essential ingredient of their faith. It determines whether or not Jesus

is the true Messiah or a false messiah. The idea of a 'failed messiah', then, has no place in dialogue with committed Christians.

By calling Jesus a messiah (albeit a failed one), Greenberg has offered a radical new paradigm. But the title sends mixed signals; such was the conclusion of Shaul Magid. Greenberg was not trying to reclaim Jesus, Magid wrote, 'as much as complicate the very notion of the Messiah in order to meet his Christian interlocutors half way' (Magid 2011:366).

The resurrection of Jesus is the defining event of the New Testament, just as the Exodus is the defining event of the Tanakh. Conservative Rabbi Michael Goldberg recognizes the importance of each. In his 1985 book, *Getting our stories straight*, he explains that Jews and Christians need to understand and appreciate how each of these contributes to what he calls 'master stories'. These master stories 'offer us both a model for understanding the world and a guide for acting in it'. They not only inform us, he says, 'but more crucially, they form us' (Goldberg 1985:13).

In the first half of the book he traces the origins and calling of the Jewish people. This will be compared and contrasted with the life of Jesus, which is the focus of the second half. Each master story has its own view of God and the world we live in. 'Obviously', he writes, 'if none of these events, whether natural or supernatural, ever really happened, then all our narrative based claims about God and everything else would simply stand unjustified' (Goldberg 1985:112). In each case Goldberg assumes the texts are reliable, or at least conform to a 'general historicity' (Goldberg 1985:220). He offers a non-critical summary.

For Goldberg, the Jewish master story is about one group of people, yet it 'holds out a future vision of how the life of all peoples may be sustained – and even transformed! – in the future' (Goldberg 1985:127). For his study of the life of Jesus, Goldberg uses the gospel of Matthew. He begins with the genealogy in Matthew 1 and recognizes that 'this story is related to another that starts with Abraham and runs through David' (Goldberg 1985:135). Clearly, the New Testament is claiming to be a continuation of the Jewish master story. But as the events unfold, Goldberg notices something amazing in the teachings of Jesus: 'Jesus is no longer merely a teller of parables of God, but is instead the parable of God himself; he is the transcendent touching the worldly in and through ordinary life' (Goldberg 1985:163).

Goldberg recognizes that Jesus is claiming to be much more than just a good teacher. He is making powerful claims about himself, and also about God's plan. This is seen at his final Passover celebration. Here, his words 'point not merely to the transformation of

the seder, but ultimately to the transformation of the covenant itself' (Goldberg 1985:174). After Jesus' resurrection, 'a new relationship with God is offered' (Goldberg 1985:204). The resurrection is recorded as a historical event and it is explained quite passionately: 'For the resurrected Jesus, alive in body as well as spirit, provides the most impressive kind of evidence – physical evidence! – that God does save where nothing else can' (Goldberg 1985:210).

Like Pinchas Lapide, Goldberg affirms the physical resurrection of Jesus. But, whereas Lapide was specifically investigating the historicity of the event, Goldberg seems to acknowledge it merely for the sake of his argument. He can readily say that Jesus rose from the dead, or even that he claimed equality with God. As long as these things are designated a foreign (non-Jewish) story, it becomes irrelevant whether they are true or false. It is merely someone else's story. By using the expression 'master story' (as opposed to covenant), the issue becomes one of preference. Each group is entitled to believe what they choose. This is a good fit for today's pluralistic environment, but it also creates problems in logic. Specifically, how can Jesus be a covenant breaker to some and yet the God-ordained savior to others? Either he is the fulfillment of the Tanakh, as Matthew – the text Goldberg was using – explicitly proclaims throughout his Gospel, or he is not.

There are two basic approaches to Jewish-Christian dialogue. One is to acknowledge the differences, agree to disagree, and respect the right of the other participant to hold their specific views. Another way is to pretend that there are no differences, or that both views – even where competing – are correct. Michael S. Kogan offers a combination of these two in his book, *Opening the covenant: A Jewish theology of Christianity*. He begins by saying that each side must 'give up long-standing convictions of their own exclusive possession of truth' (Kogan 2008:xii). Christians must 'reexamine' the exclusive claim that Jesus alone provides salvation, and Jews must acknowledge that God was 'involved with' the life of Jesus (Kogan 2008:xiii).

This approach places dialogue and pluralism above the actual beliefs of each group. Later in the book, however, he will explain that neither side should ask the other to give up core doctrines (Kogan 2008:102). For most of the book, Kogan attempts to navigate the fine line between truth claims and pluralism. He reads the Tanakh and the New Testament through a modern, ecumenical lens, even when the contexts call for something quite different.

For example, he explains that pluralism may be found going all the way back to the Tanakh. Micah 4:5 says: 'For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever'. This verse is quoted twice

(Kogan 2008:11, 232) in an attempt to argue against exclusivism. But, this interpretation is problematic at best. It denies the Tanakh's central claim that there is only one God. Most interpreters see this verse as stating the opposite of pluralism, as a denunciation of false pagan gods as compared with the truth of the One True God of Israel.

Kogan is on more solid Biblical ground when he explains that the Tanakh speaks of both a unique calling for Jews, and yet a future 'opening' for the Gentiles to join in God's Kingdom as well. The New Testament affirms this. Paul clearly expressed God's unique and ongoing call for the Jewish people and he was also the apostle to the Gentiles. Kogan can readily accept this much, as it fits with his agenda. But, his next step strays from the New Testament's message. Jews, he writes, 'can entertain the truth claims of Christianity only if we view it as a faith revealed by Israel's God to and for gentiles' (Kogan 2008:34).

Jesus did open the door for the Gentile world, but according to the New Testament his coming was also very much *for* the Jews. This issue needs to be at least mentioned in such a discussion. Kogan is certainly free to disagree with this claim and argue against it if he chooses. But, he needs to explain how Jesus was either never meant to be for any Jews, or (as is more likely his position) that he was somehow only for the initial group of Jewish disciples.

Some theological constructions have attempted to solve this problem. According to one such plan, Matthew's gospel begins with a charge to bring the message of Jesus to the Jews (Mt 10:6), but ends with a statement (28:19) that is taken to mean that Jews are excluded from the Great Commission. But, as Amy-Jill Levine has demonstrated, this view does not fit with the New Testament data (Levine 1988). Others have claimed that Paul's statements in Acts (Ac 13:44-48; 18:5-6) about turning to the Gentiles would justify such a position. But, this was clearly a localized decision, as the narrative demonstrates. The point is, Kogan and others who use the New Testament in Jewish-Christian relations need to deal with this all-important claim. The New Testament describes Jesus as the Messiah, the one whose coming was in fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets, and whose life and message was for Jews and Gentiles alike. Kogan deals with this claim in a unique way.

He surveys the passages from the Tanakh that are typically part of the discussion of messiahship. He does not come out and say that Jesus does not fit the bill, but it is usually implied in his evaluations. For example, speaking of Jeremiah's new covenant (Jr 31:31-34) he concludes: 'All this will be accomplished directly by God, with no mention of (or, seemingly, need for) a Messianic figure' (Kogan 2008:45). Traditionally, such conclusions would be used to disqualify Jesus as the Messiah. But, for Kogan that

is the wrong question. There were many messianic ideas in Second Temple Judaism and the earliest followers of Jesus should legitimately be counted among this group. This leads him to conclude the following about Jesus: 'He was a Jewish Messiah' (Kogan 2008:68). He came to bring redemption to the world, but not to Israel.

Again, he has failed to deal with the many passages that state directly or indirectly that Jews need Jesus. Whether or not Kogan sees this as a relevant question, the New Testament does. Some passages are cited literally, others figuratively or typologically, and still others are perplexing. But, this is the overall claim of the New Testament. It seems that there are only two logical possibilities in response to this (it is either true or it is not). Calling Jesus a Jewish Messiah simply evades the evidence.

In a similar way, Kogan also addresses three 'central propositions' of the Christian faith. These include the incarnation, the vicarious atonement and the resurrection. The question is: how can Jews reject these events and yet affirm them for their Christian friends and neighbors in a positive way? He writes:

I believe that, *while we cannot affirm the truth of these propositions, we need no longer insist on their falsity*. We cannot affirm their truth because that can only be done from the standpoint of Christian faith, a standpoint we do not share. Nevertheless, we need no longer insist on their falsity, because their message is not now being used by mainstream churches to undermine our faith and because the logic of our view that the divine hand guides Christianity as well as Judaism leads us to entertain the possibility of their being true.

(Kogan 2008:115 emphasis in the original)

Discussing the resurrection, he begins with the following observations: Most Jews at the time 'saw no reason' to believe it, those who saw the risen Christ were already 'part of his following', the one exception to this, Paul, had a vision, or a religious experience. He states: 'Visions are certainly valid for those who have them, but, by their very nature, they cannot demonstrate their validity for others not privy to them' (Kogan 2008:117). He does not categorically say the event did not happen. However, if it did, he assures his fellow Jews, 'it neither speaks to us directly nor threatens us in any way' (Kogan 2008:118).

3.6.2 Romans 11:26

Romans 9-11 is the key New Testament passage about the Jewish people and salvation. It has garnered a variety of interpretations throughout history, often at least partially based on the current social situation of the exegete. This is especially true of Paul's words that 'all Israel will be saved' (Rm 11:26). The Church's supercessionist position had an enormous influence on interpretation. Yet, this passage made it difficult

to entirely abandon the idea that God was finished with the Jewish people. Jeremy Cohen surveyed these interpretations and concluded,

From the first centuries of the patristic period through the end of the Middle Ages, Christian theologians and exegetes debated and equivocated over the number and identity of those Jews included in Paul's prophecy, and how and when it would materialize. Moreover, while theological differences concerning the "hermeneutical Jew" of the past and present may have jibed with alternative ecclesiastical policies vis-à-vis the Jews of Christendom, the interpretation history of Rom 11:25-26 appears to militate against any neat categorization or taxonomy of alternative opinions.

(Cohen 2005: 281)

There are several ways Paul's thought may be addressed. Michael J. Cook employed straight forward approach. He too believes that Romans was written in response to specific historical and social situations, as 'Jews, Jewish-Christians, and Gentile-Christians' (Cook 2006:93) were in a state of tension. He sees the issues as temporal and localized, and therefore having no relevance for Jewish-Christian relations today. Also, he proposes that history argues against Paul's teaching.

As for Paul's insistence that the hardening that has come over Israel is only temporary, Jews today – approximately two millennia after Paul's ministry – overwhelmingly continue to deny Jesus as the Christ. Which course, then, is the more compelling: that this already seemingly interminable wait must continue still, or that Paul's expectation must now, at long last, be dismissed as mistaken?

(Cook 2006:104)

But, this point may be easily challenged. First, there are some who believe today's Messianic Jews represent the beginnings of the fulfillment of Paul's plan – the first stage leading to his 'all Israel' accepting Jesus as Messiah. Others strongly disagree, and time will ultimately tell which opinion is correct. Either way, the number of years that have gone by is not an issue. This same two millennia period also saw the longest diaspora in Jewish history. The 'seemingly interminable wait' until 1948 caused many to assume (wrongly) that God was finished with the Jewish people. The length of the wait did not cancel the promise.

Cook's other reasons for rejecting Paul's words fall into categories treated above. For example, Paul's view of Jesus as a 'dying and rising Greco-Roman Savior-deity' clashes with Judaism's views on both the messiah, and forgiveness of sin in general (Cook 2006:106). A two-covenant reading of this passage is also criticized. Such an interpretation, Cook says, 'is neither theologically, nor textually, defensible'. He continues:

Unless he believes that accepting Christ is a sine qua non for Israel herself to be saved, why is Paul so exercised by his fellow Jews' recalcitrance, or why would he seek refuge in the contorted fantasy that Israel's *jealousy* will motivate her to accept Christ? No, for Paul faith that Jesus is the Christ—in the sense that Paul characteristically defines him – is the *sole* avenue to redemption for Jews as well as Gentiles.

(Cook 2006:105; emphasis in the original)

Along with rejecting the traditional understanding of Paul's message (as Cook does), another approach is to reinterpret the meaning. Modern Pauline scholars have been steadily offering alternatives. Mark Nanos is one of the most prominent Jewish scholars of Paul today. He presents a radically new paradigm that challenges several areas of conventional wisdom. This was noticed in Amy-Jill Levine's review of his book, *The mystery of Romans*. 'Should he be correct,' she wrote, 'his work requires a rethinking not just of the epistle but also of the history of the Romans church, of Pauline soteriology, and potentially of contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue' (Levine 1998:222). Nanos surveyed the common views of Romans 11:26 and offered his evaluation. Most interestingly, he responds to those who say that Israel's salvation is 'independent of Christ or the Gospel', and concludes the following.

In fact, while the proponents of this explicitly seek to propose a modern view that is respectful of Jews and Judaism in Paul's theology, paradoxically, their position excludes Jews from Christ and makes little sense of the situation of Paul and other Christian Jews, their mission, or their suffering for their confession that Jesus was Israel's Messiah.

(Nanos 1996:258)

Nanos views Israel's salvation exclusively in national terms. Israel has a unique role to play in God's plan, and the salvation in question refers to being restored to their original role as messengers. This is explained succinctly in his commentary on Romans 11:26 in the *JANT*: 'Paul's argument is based not on being in need of restoration to the covenant, but of being disciplined because they have not undertaken the covenant obligation of being entrusted with God's oracles to the nations' (Nanos 2011:278).

While he rightly recognizes the importance of Israel's national role, his overall thesis has no room for the consequences of personal sin and the role Paul ascribes to Jesus in response to this. His theories about Paul and the law have procured popularity in a number of circles. However, his view of Romans 9-11 has by no means achieved the same level of acceptance. Alan Segal, who was otherwise quite positive about Nanos' work, specifically said he disagreed with him here. Segal then made his own observations.

I think Paul expected that God would eventually convert all to faith in Christ. But on this matter, the apostle is voicing a private opinion because he did not have the guidance of a revelation on which to base his belief. He argues strongly that God has constantly moved in surprising and unexpected ways to fulfill promises. In the end there can be no triumphalism.

(Segal 2007:34)

Pamela Eisenbaum also offers an important new model for viewing Paul. She begins with the 'New Perspective' paradigm championed by Stendahl and Sanders, and adds her own touches. Like Nanos, she rightfully argues that Paul must be understood both as a Jew and in his Jewish context. However, she assigns a limited role for Jesus when it comes to the Jewish people.

To put it boldly, Jesus saves, but he only saves Gentiles. By that I do not mean that Paul believed that Jesus is irrelevant for Jews. Paul hoped his fellow Jews would eventually recognize the cosmic significance of Jesus as marking the beginning of the messianic age. But the significance was not that Jews needed to be saved from their sins. The efficacy of Jesus' sacrificial death was for the forgiveness of the sins of the nations.

(Eisenbaum 2009:242)

Two main arguments run through her book and bring her to this conclusion. First, following the playbook of the New Perspective on Paul, she does not believe that individual faith is necessary for Jews or Gentiles. God's covenant with Jews is secured, and the law acts not as a barometer but rather as a means of affirming the covenant that already exists. Similarly, God's covenant with the Gentiles is based on what Jesus has already done, and not procured by individual faith.

She offers Romans 3:22 as proof. The phrase πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ has traditionally been translated as 'faith in Jesus Christ'. She, along with other scholars, argues that a more correct rendering would be 'faithfulness of Jesus Christ' (Eisenbaum 2009:189-195). The problem is that this phrase, which appears several times in Paul's letters, is not the only place where the need for individual faith is proclaimed. Galatians 2:16 uses this phrase, yet continues in the very same verse to (unambiguously) say: 'And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ' (NRSV). Likewise, Romans 10:9-10 clearly calls for personal faith. The issue does not hinge on Romans 3:22.

Her other recurring argument throughout her book is that Romans is written to Gentiles, and therefore Paul's message should be understood with this in mind. The message about Jesus, in other words, is purely for Gentiles. As she says, 'What the Torah does for Jews, Jesus does for Gentiles' (Eisenbaum 2009:244). Yet, throughout Romans,

Paul specifically states that Jews need Jesus for the same reason Gentiles need him (Rm 1:16; 10:9, 10), and –as Nanos noticed - Paul sees a real problem for Jews who are without him (Rm 9:2, 3; 10:1).

In her final chapter, she brings up Romans 9-11 and acknowledges that it has not been addressed in this work. Doing so, she writes, ‘would have required another book’ (Eisenbaum 2009:251). But, she does add some brief comments. As to the issues of two different means of salvation for Jews and Gentiles, ultimately that is the wrong question. While admitting that she has not ‘worked through the nuances of the text to argue [her] case’ (Eisenbaum 2009:255), she offers the following conclusion:

The starting assumption of the new paradigm is that it is not about personal salvation. Paul’s letter to the Romans is not an answer to the question, How can I be saved? Rather, it is his answer to the question, How will the world be redeemed, and how do I faithfully participate in that redemption? For Paul the question had great urgency, since God had already initiated the process of redemption.

(Eisenbaum 2009:252)

A two-covenant reading of Romans 11:26 is popular in ecumenical circles. It may also be a tool to dismiss an examination of the resurrection of Jesus. This is demonstrated dramatically in the book *Resurrection: The power of God for Christians and Jews*. Fellow Harvard professors Kevin Madigan and Jon D. Levenson teamed up to discuss both the resurrection of Jesus as well as the end-times resurrection of traditional Judaism. It is an affirming and complementary study. The opening words of the forward declares it to be ‘a book by a Christian and a Jew’ and the authors write with one voice.

Madigan and Levenson acknowledge that the first disciples, along with Paul, clearly believed in the importance of the resurrection as an actual, physical, historical event. This was so important to Paul that, if it did not happen, ‘every Christian’s faith would be in vain’ (Madigan & Levenson 2009:25). The authors do not share their personal beliefs directly, but some inferences may be drawn. Madigan identifies as a Christian, and therefore (one would assume) he believes that the resurrection is a historical event. It would be hard to conclude otherwise given what the authors have said about Paul’s view of the resurrection. There would simply be no reason for him to identify as a Christian without this belief.

Levenson’s opinion of the resurrection of Jesus is likewise not stated. But according to the authors, this is irrelevant. Paul’s theology provides an exclusion for Jews. To uphold this view, the authors provide a hermeneutic which seems ultimately devised for the sole purpose of using Romans 11:26 as their capstone. The earliest Christian communities, they write, conceived of themselves as the new Israel (implying a form of

supercessionism). Passages from Acts 1-5 are cited to demonstrate this. But, the term 'Christian communities' (especially as it is used here) is anachronistic prior to Acts 11:26. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews. Yet, the authors consistently speak of two groups: Jews and the church. The impression given – although surely the authors know otherwise – is that Jews were never part of the community of believers in Jesus. This construction enables them to conclude as follows.

Paul thought in terms of three groups: Jews, Pagans and the Church. For the Pagans of that world, the only hope was to cease to be Pagans and to become sons of Abraham.... For Christians, Paul thought that this adoption would be affected through baptism; for Jews, it had been accomplished through circumcision, and so Israel and the sons of Abraham would be saved.

(Madigan & Levenson 2009:32)

These words are then followed by a quote from Romans 11:25-27. All Israel will be saved, they reason, since Paul thought in these three categories. But, this is not an accurate representative of either the early Church or Paul's ecclesiology in Romans. In truth, Paul thought in terms of four groups. These include Jews (those who believed, and those who did not) and Gentiles (those who believed and those who did not). Interestingly, it is only by denying the historical reality of Jewish Christians back then that the authors were able to devise a plan which excludes Jews from needing Jesus today.

Madigan and Levenson nevertheless believe that Paul was not a universalist, apart from the exclusion for Jews. Paul clearly believed that all have sinned and that Jesus provides a very real solution to a very real problem. They make this point definitively and offer several verses as proof. One of them, ironically, is Romans 1:16. The first part of the verse is quoted, which says that the gospel is the power of God to all who believe. 'Paul', they comment, 'links one's eternal destiny to one's willingness to believe in the Christian message' (Madigan & Levenson 209:34). The remaining part of the verse (which they do not quote) says that this same Gospel is 'to the Jew first'. This makes their use of Romans 11:26 all the more ironic.

3.6.3 The role of the Temple

The vocabulary of Judaism and Christianity is diverse on the issue of being made right with God. Words like atonement, repentance, redemption, salvation and justification are used in different ways even within each tradition. Some of these may have both an individual and a corporate connotation. For this reason, it is sometimes assumed that the two are so different that any attempt at correlation or even discussion is a lost cause (Neusner 1989; Wyschogrod 2004).

But, on a more basic level, each group acknowledges the need for forgiveness from God and expiation of sin. Both groups acknowledge the Tanakh/Old Testament as the foundational authority for their beliefs. The solution for the sin problem in the Tanakh revolved around the sacrificial system. Therefore, the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE raises some important questions. The New Testament proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice. The Mishnah and later rabbinic writings explains that there are other means of atonement, apart from a blood sacrifice, that are acceptable to God. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* summarizes this position:

After the destruction of the Temple and the consequent cessation of sacrifices, the rabbis declared: "Prayer, repentance, and charity avert the evil decree" (TJ, Ta'an.2:1, 65b). Suffering is also regarded as a means of atonement and is considered more effective than sacrifice to win God's favor (Ber. 5a). Exile and the destruction of the Temple (Sanh. 37b, Ex. R. 31:10) were also reputed to bring about the same effect.

(Roth 1971:831-832)

Almost by definition, Rabbinic Judaism is founded upon the belief that the sacrificial system is not mandatory to receive atonement. But, whether or not the Tanakh expressly promotes this, or even allows for this possibility, has been an important point of discussion. The New Testament speaks often of the importance of the blood, and specifically states that atonement is not possible without it (Hebrews 9:22). Whether the Tanakh explicitly makes a similar definitive claim is disputed. Some point to Leviticus 17:11, but this has been debated even within traditional Judaism. Some say that the emphasis on the blood in this verse is not necessarily an absolute (Milgrom 1971), while others (including the Talmud and Rashi) affirm the importance of the blood in relationship to sacrifices, and therefore atonement (see the discussion in Brown 2000:107-111).

The real question, then, is whether the Tanakh offers evidence for the possibility of any other means of atonement, given the overwhelming emphases of blood sacrifices. Passages such as Hosea 6:6 and Micah 6:6-8 have been used to say that the prophets repudiated the sacrificial system, or at least that God prefers the idea of mercy in the place of sacrifices. But, there are three main problems with this common understanding. First, it is difficult to imagine that the prophets would speak against such a fundamental principle of the Torah. Second, the language in these passages is hyperbolic. God was condemning sacrifices given with the wrong heart attitude, He was not condemning the offering itself. Similar hyperbole appears in Isaiah 1:10-17 regarding prayer and the observance of the Sabbath, and no one would argue that Isaiah was repudiating either of these. Third, after the Babylonian Captivity (which took place after the time of Hosea

and Micah and their words mentioned above), the primary concern for the returning exiles was the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezr 1:2-4; 6:3-5).

The importance of the sacrificial system during the Second Temple period has also been debated. On one hand, some scholars believe the institution was already losing relevance. Pamela Eisenbaum surveyed the literature and found that 'admiration toward the temple in ancient Judaism is mixed with ambivalence' (Eisenbaum 2009:71). Some Jews were critical of the temple establishment, and evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates that this group believed that the temple had either become defiled or it did not possess 'the adequate degree of holiness' (Eisenbaum 2009:71). She concludes: 'In short, while the temple is of central importance to Second Temple Judaism, that importance was mostly symbolic for the majority of Jews. Its significance had become relativized even before the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 CE' (Eisenbaum 2009:72).

The attitude of the people must be weighed against God's commands in the Torah itself. There was also a lax relationship to the first Temple, and that was one reason why it was destroyed. Clearly, the sacrificial system was always important in God's plan. Well over fifty percent of the Law of Moses concerns the sacrificial system in one way or another. Any discussion about the law, especially regarding one's relationship with God, must include a discussion about the sacrificial system. The current absence of the Temple, then, needs to acknowledge the importance of sacrifices in the Tanakh, and yet explain why this current lack is not a problem. Orthodox Jewish scholars, Berger and Wyschogrod, wrote the following: 'When sacrifice is possible it is necessary, though useless without repentance (the "broken spirit" and "wounded heart"). When sacrifice is not possible, God forgives those who sincerely repent' (Berger & Wyschogrod 1978:58-59).

An alternative view comes from Michael L. Brown, a Jewish believer in Jesus who holds a PhD in Near Eastern Literature and Language from NYU. His discussion of this subject is by far the most exhaustive, and he argues that the Tanakh does not allow for the possibility of atonement without a blood sacrifice. Regarding the Babylonian Captivity as a precedent, as alluded to above, Brown reminds his readers that the sole reason for the exile was punishment for disobedience. This is stated clearly throughout the book of Jeremiah. Even before the temple was destroyed, God said He would no longer even listen to the prayers of His people. The destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylon were further results of this punishment. Brown concludes,

The Temple was destroyed because of our sins as a people, sins that were so grievous to God that he said, "Enough! No amount of prayer, sacrifice, or fasting will stop me. I will reject my city and my sanctuary, and I will judge my people, banishing them from my

presence.” How ludicrous to say then, “Now that the Temple has been sacked and we can no longer offer sacrifices, God will accept our prayers instead.”

(Brown 2000:101)

Brown also discusses all of the relevant passages that have been traditionally used to argue that the Tanakh does allow for atonement without sacrifices. This debate will no doubt continue, especially on a popular level. The implications are profound. The belief in alternative means of atonement (apart from the Temple) serves two important functions within Judaism. It not only makes the destruction of the Temple a non-issue, it also discredits the need to seriously consider the New Testament’s claim of unique atonement in Jesus.

But, for many Jews, what the Tanakh actually says on this topic may not be the final word. Orthodox Jews believe the Oral Law comes directly from Sinai, whether literally or figuratively (Avot 1:1). To challenge the authority of the Mishnah and subsequent rabbinic literature is the equivalent of questioning Moses, something Orthodox Jews simply will not do. If Yochanon ben Zakkai and others said that atonement is possible without blood, then it may not even matter for Orthodox Jews whether or not this can be validated in the pages of the Tanakh.

Non-orthodox Jews usually have a very different take on the subject, in part because they do not hold to a literal view of either the Tanakh or the Oral Law. The absence of a functioning Temple is therefore not a problem. Atonement itself is either an outdated concept, or it may be achieved by other rational, less barbaric means. Joseph Telushkin has summarized the modern spectrum.

Reform Judaism simply has dropped reference to the entire subject from its prayerbook: It views sacrifices as a primitive stage in Jewish religious development, one in which there is no reason to take pride. The Orthodox prayerbook, on the other hand, repeatedly reiterates the hope that the Temple will be rebuilt, and sacrifices offered there again. The Conservative prayerbook has changed all the future references to sacrifices to the past tense: It speaks proudly of the sacrifices that once were brought before God at the Temple, but expresses no desire to have them reinstated.

(Telushkin 1991:62)

Rabbinic Judaism grew out of the ashes of the Temple and in the process developed a system that allows for the possibility of atonement without sacrifices. Liberal forms of Judaism do not share the same presuppositions as their more religious brethren. But, in the end there has emerged a unified Jewish opinion on this issue, one that rallies around a common disbelief. Amy Jill-Levine (2007:18) sums this up as follows: ‘For Jews, Jesus is unnecessary or redundant; he is not needed to save from sin or from

death, since Judaism proclaims a deity ready to forgive repentant sinners and since it asserts that “all Israel has a share in the world to come” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1)’.

3.6.4 Conclusion

Paul’s view of Israel in Romans 9-11 has been, and will continue to be, a hot button issue for Jewish-Christian relations. It addresses God’s ultimate plan, and the specific roles of both Jews and Gentiles. Broadly speaking, interpretations fall into one of three categories.

Historically, the Church’s main way of relating to the Jews has been supercessionism – the belief that God is finished with the Jewish people, and that the Church is the ‘new’ Israel. Today, this is sometimes euphemistically called ‘fulfillment theology’. This position is difficult to maintain in light of Paul’s statements, for example, that to the Jews ‘belong’ (present tense) the covenants (Rm 9:4), and that ‘the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rm 11:29). It has also lead to unspeakable tragedies throughout the last two thousand years.

In response to supercessionism, new alternatives arose. The second category affirms God’s ongoing plan for Israel as a whole, yet abandons the need for individual Jews to believe in Jesus. This is two-covenant theology. Paul did speak of two covenants, but both of these were made with the Jewish people (Gl 3:18). The ‘New Covenant’ (Lk 22:10; Heb 8:8-10) was also made with the Jewish people (Jr 31:31), yet expanded to include Gentiles. There is simply no such thing as a uniquely ‘Christian’ covenant for Gentiles, as convenient as that term may be for modern dialogue.

An offshoot of two-covenant theology says that *no one* actually needs to accept Jesus in order to be made right with God. Such theories are constructed on the basis of pluralism, universalism or new paradigms about Paul’s teaching. So far, no single plan has won the day.

A third position is embraced by many Christians and, by definition, all Messianic Jews. This view affirms both God’s plan and calling of the Jewish people, and the uniqueness of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. It is not popular or, for that matter, politically correct. However, it is perhaps the only one of these theories that takes into account all of the relevant passages from both the Tanakh and the New Testament concerning Israel and Jesus. Both the theology (Fruchtenbaum 1994; Vlach 2010) and the practical out workings (Rudolph & Willets 2013; Goldberg 2003) of this view need to be part of the discussion.

Right in the middle of Romans 9-11 stands the following words: 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rm 10:9). However the term salvation may be understood in this context, two things are clear. First, the resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal event in Paul's great plan. Second, as is made plain in the following four verses, both Jews and Gentiles must personally confess and believe this. The role of the resurrection of Jesus cannot be overestimated in New Testament soteriology. Before getting bogged down in all of these theological complexities, the question of whether or not there is evidence for the historicity of the resurrection seems a good place to start. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Jewish views of the resurrection of Jesus

This Section is the meat of this study. It will survey the writings of Jewish scholars who have commented on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. These views appear in different contexts and are therefore categorized into different sections. They appear chronologically within each category. Although they are all Jewish, it is an eclectic group. The time span is over a hundred years. The contributors are American, European and Israeli, and the term 'scholar' is used here in abroad sense. Some are among the leading scholars in their field, others wrote on a more popular level. They also represent various levels of Jewish religious traditions.

The first Section is for biographies of Jesus, those who have written extensively on the life of Jesus. Section 2 is the most important, as it includes the scholars who have written specifically to address the question of the resurrection. The third Section includes authors of books on Jewish history who commented on the resurrection within their brief sections on the origins of Christianity. The fourth Section, called 'Honorable mention', includes the writings of three scholars who fall just outside the parameters of this overall study, yet provide valuable insights into the popular Jewish responses to the resurrection.

Each entry will include the author's general view of Jesus or the Gospels, where applicable, to establish the context of their view. With some of the scholars, particularly those in Section 2, many of their views on peripheral issues have already been discussed above. Common suggestions, such as hallucination theories for the disciples, will be discussed in the synthesis in the following Chapter. Unique comments and approaches will be addressed below in their respective sections.

4.1 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

This category provides an overview of the evolving Jewish scholarship that one way or another sought to address the question, '*who is Jesus*'? It includes books on the life of Jesus and, where applicable, the life of Paul as well. These works aimed to find the historical Jesus. The earlier books were specifically concerned with reclaiming Jesus as a fellow Jew, and discovering how much of his message, if any at all, may align with contemporary Judaism. The more recent scholars (Flusser, Fredriksen) assumed a Jewish background for Jesus and his world, as was becoming common in New Testament scholarship in general. Issues of modern Jewish-Christian relations were virtually negligible in their writings.

These authors all produced an entire book about Jesus, with the exception of Goodman, whose study of Jesus was half of his book. Geza Vermes fits into this category as well, but his work will be treated below as he also wrote an entire book about the resurrection of Jesus. Claude Montefiore's book is unique in both quantity and quality. He began with the texts of the synoptic Gospels and offered a thorough commentary, including his views on the historical Jesus. All of the others attempted to write a biography where the New Testament was variously employed, but usually assumed to be of little value in the discussion. Because of this, Montefiore wrote the most comprehensive study of the resurrection in this Section.

4.1.1 Paul Goodman

Paul Goodman was a British Zionist leader and author. His book, *The synagogue and the church* seeks to offer a defense of Judaism, specifically by comparing it with Christianity. Like other scholars of his day, he was positive about Jesus himself, while dismissing the religious system that would form around him. 'The charm of his personality,' he wrote, 'has sent its rays all over the world, and infused countless human hearts with the Spirit of Love and self sacrifice' (Goodman 1908:230).

He understands that there is a paradox. Gentiles around the world have embraced Jesus. But, why is it that his own people have not acknowledged him even though 'the roots' of his life and thought 'lie entirely in Jewish soil' (Goodman 1908:230)? Goodman sees the main problem as theological, objecting to the 'fundamental Christian belief that Jesus Christ is God himself, the Lord and Savior of mankind' (Goodman 1908:233). He touches on other issues as well, including the resurrection: 'Now, it is an unquestionable fact that the resurrection represents an event absolutely beyond our experience, and, if it really took place, it was contrary to all laws of nature' (Goodman 1908:252).

Goodman questioned the way the four Gospel writers recorded the resurrection. He believed they 'heard of the event more as of a current rumour turned into a tradition than as an actual occurrence of which they knew the real facts' (Goodman 1908:253). He specifically states 'undeniable contradictions' (Goodman 1908:258) as the reason to dismiss their reliability. He then proposes his own interpretation of what really happened.

From the significant concurrence of the evangelists, it would seem that the origin of the story came from Mary Magdalene, that weird figure among the followers of Jesus, who had been cured by him of a mental affliction by having "seven demons" cast out of her. Considering the nervous tension created in her excited mind by the death of Jesus, and her devoted attention to his grave after the burial, it is possible that she may have imagined that she had seen angels, and even Jesus himself.

(Goodman 1908:257)

By offering this construction, Goodman has acknowledged several things. These include the facts that Jesus did perform a healing (albeit 'mental' and not spiritual), that he was buried, and that his grave was commonly known. He also believed that the early Church was started by 'the disciples he gathered around Him [sic] and those who believed in his mission as the Messiah promised by the prophets' (Goodman 1908:295).

4.1.2 Claude G. Montefiore

Claude G. Montefiore was a scholar and leading figure of liberal Judaism in England at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1909, he wrote an exhaustive study on the synoptic Gospels. It consists of two volumes, each over 300 pages, including his translation of the texts. This was a pioneering and radical endeavor for a Jewish scholar at the time. It caused quite a stir in many circles. Daniel Langton summarized the reactions of Jewish scholars.

Contemporaries such as Michael Friedlander, head of the Orthodox rabbinical training school, Jews College, maintained that Montefiore's writings revealed an "anti-Jewish tendency" The cultural Zionist Ahad Ha-Am agreed, detecting a "subservience of the Jewish thinker to the Christian doctrine", and argued that Montefiore's New Testament studies would only promote conversion. Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz accused him of following the apostle Paul in abrogating Torah. Solomon Schechter argued that his teachings were not so much Liberal Judaism as Liberal Christianity.

(Langton 1999:98)

Montefiore saw the value in such a project, saying it is 'of great importance for Jews to understand and appreciate aright the life and teaching of Jesus' (Montefiore 1909 xix). In this, he predated the *JANT* by one hundred and three years. He approached the texts as a Jew, but a modern and enlightened Jew. Hence, miracles are questioned from the start. For those who do believe in miracles, he says, it would not be difficult to affirm the specific examples found in the New Testament. But, that is one part of the argument.

If, on the other hand, like the writer of this book, we do not believe that the miracles happened then it seems tolerably certain that whatever substratum or residue of non-miraculous fact these stories may contain, they could not have been directly reported, in the form in which we now possess them, to the writer of the Gospel by actual eyewitnesses.

(Montefiore 1909:xxiv)

Montefiore was well versed in the New Testament scholarship of his day, which was highly skeptical. In fact, he was often more sympathetic to the Gospels than some of the Christian scholars. Many of the events recorded in the Gospels are acknowledged as actual history. The crucifixion happened. Jesus died. Joseph of Arimathea, he believes, was a real person who provided the tomb where Jesus was placed. Arguments against

the historicity of Joseph are dismissed. For example, Isaiah 53:9 (being with a rich man in his grave) is sometimes assumed to be the antecedent for the creation of the Joseph story. But, this verse, he remarks, is not quoted in the Gospels. Also, he says, the burial is confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:4.

Montefiore believed Joseph's involvement was not necessarily because he was a disciple, since Mark originally says merely that he was waiting for the kingdom of God. This expression equally describes many Pharisees. Joseph was probably sympathetic, he writes, but his involvement with the burial is probably more related to his desire to carry out the law in Deuteronomy than anything else (Montefiore 1909:378).

He writes factually and addresses the historical questions, but Montefiore was also painfully aware of the horrors done against the Jews because of the death of Jesus. It is an ever-present reality. Yet, in spite of this, he believed that both the life and death of Jesus were 'of immense benefit to the world'. Because of Jesus, a large portion of Judaism's truth has been taught to the nations. All of these factors, for good and bad, he concludes, are part of God's calling upon the Jewish people (Montefiore 1909:382).

He begins his discussion on the resurrection with a couple of caveats. First, the primary focus of his book is the life and teachings of Jesus. The narratives about his death have little importance for him, and those of the resurrection are 'least important of all'. Agreeing with other scholars, he saw the resurrection as more properly a discussion for Church history. Second, this book is not meant to be polemical, and therefore there was no reason to engage in all the details of the resurrection. That would entail a major examination of the evidence ranging from the internal inconsistencies in the texts, to the massive literature that argues against the empty tomb (Montefiore 1909:383). He says: 'But the author of this book need not enter into these discussions. He writes frankly as a Jew, and therefore, as one who does not so 'believe in' the resurrection as would logically compel him to change his creed. He is not concerned either to defend his own faith or attack the faith of others' (Montefiore 1909:383).

After such a statement, the reader might expect him to skip over the resurrection entirely. But, he proceeds with the investigation and it is quite detailed. He believes that it is most probable that 'the disciples, or some of them, saw a vision of Jesus which they believed to be a vision of their risen Master'. In this sense, the Gospels are historical. The disciples really had such experiences. This is 'more probable' than the popular counter theories of the day. These include that the stories were completely fabricated, that the disciples were lying, and that the story was based on legends that developed over time. Once the visions are accepted, there are two possibilities.

The first option is that the disciples actually saw Jesus in ‘some special supernatural manifestation’. The other possibility is that what they saw was exclusively a ‘product of the mental condition of the seer’. Montefiore assumes the latter. However, he goes on to say that belief in the former view, an actual supernatural experience, does not necessarily challenge the Jewishness of one who might hold such a view. For those who affirm the immortality of the soul, there is such a thing as a continued existence after death. A physical resurrection, however, is excluded as an acceptable Jewish view. While he does not believe in the immortality of the soul, he acknowledges that in the case of Jesus – or even Mohammed – such a supernatural existence is possible. In fact, he continues, it is easier to believe the great world religions that came from each of these men began with some type of ‘divine interventions’ than subjective illusions (Montefiore 1909: 384). This is not his final word: ‘But, on the other hand, it is, for other reasons, our scientific duty to do without miracles when we can. If all other miracles are ill-founded, it is probable that this one is ill founded too’ (Montefiore 1909:384).

This is circular reasoning. It is not clear how he arrived at the belief that all other miracles are ‘ill-founded’. He is assuming the very thing he wants to prove. Even if all other miracles were shown to be false, it does not follow that the resurrection must be false as well. This is similar to David Hume’s argument that competing miraculous claims cancel each other out (see above § 3:1:2). Both arguments dismiss the possibility of the miraculous from the start.

A subjective experience is preferred, he says, because it adequately makes sense of the narrative, and it explains the events ‘with adequate psychological verisimilitude’ (Montefiore 1909:385). However, he continues, for those who believe in immortality, the resurrection of Jesus might have really happened. It is ultimately a matter of worldview (to use our modern terminology), and preference. Thus, he states, ‘to those who have not grown up in, or who have not retained, the old Christian theology, the ‘resurrection’ of Jesus has no central importance’ (Montefiore 1909:385).

One thing remains perplexing. He believes that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Yet, belief in the resurrection of Jesus created a movement that changed the world. As he says, ‘it is hard to be content that great religious results should have had not quite satisfactory causes’. But, in the end, he reasons, there are many unresolved issues and mysteries in life. We cannot understand ‘the means which God allows’ in His overall scheme (Montefiore 1909:385).

He next approaches the empty tomb. The women come to the tomb to anoint the body, although they did so after two days. This, for Montefiore, is ‘not likely to be historic’. This is a minor detail, however, and ultimately he believed that the ‘narrative, in its essence,

is historical' (Montefiore 1909:387). The empty tomb account needs to be harmonized with the visions. For some, it is the empty tomb that caused the visions. Montefiore disagrees. He believes it came after the disciples' visions.

He then surveys other views, including: Jewish authorities stole the body, Joseph buried the body temporarily and then reburied it, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and had a vision that grew into the empty tomb story. All of these proposals are deemed 'very doubtful'. Explaining the origins of the empty tomb story is therefore 'not quite easy' (Montefiore 1909:389). For this reason, he offers a different solution: 'It is better to assume that the body of Jesus remained where it was placed without disturbance or miracle' (Montefiore 1909:389).

This view leaves open at least two lines of response. First, he acknowledges that Joseph and the women knew where the tomb was. This would have made it easy to confirm or deny the claim of the resurrection. Another scenario would be needed to counter the implications of this possibility. Second, Montefiore did not deal with the criteria of embarrassment regarding the women discovering the empty tomb. If the story was fabricated, this needs to be explained as well. In the end, however, Montefiore has produced a more exhaustive and respectful study of the synoptic Gospels than anyone else in this study who attempted to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus. After over a hundred years, perhaps it is time for a similar work based on modern scholarship.

4.1.3 Joseph Klausner

Joseph Klausner is one of the most important scholars in this study for several reasons, not the least of which is because he originally wrote about Jesus in Hebrew. Born in Russia near the end of the nineteenth century, he went to Israel in 1920 and later served as professor at the newly opened Hebrew University. He is best known as a Zionist leader and biographer of Jesus (and later, Paul).

Klausner's book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, appeared in English in 1925, just three years after it was originally published in Hebrew. His approach to the New Testament was critical, yet more generous than many of his contemporaries. He specifically questioned the portions which either highlighted the supernatural or which he believed are antithetical to Judaism. Yet to him, Jesus was undeniably Jewish, fully in line with the 'Pharisaic Judaism of his day' (Klausner 1925:363). His teaching promoted the highest moral standards and could – with modifications – be of value to Jews as well: 'If ever the day should come and this ethical code be stripped of its wrappings of miracles and mysticism, the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time' (Klausner 1925:414).

Klausner believed that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah. This is seen, for example, when he sent his disciples to find a colt for him to ride into Jerusalem. 'The point is clear,' Klausner writes about this incident, 'Jesus was minded to enter Jerusalem as the Messiah (Klausner 1925:309). But, Klausner did not believe that death and resurrection were part of Jesus' plan. Rather, he believed that upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus wanted to proclaim his messiahship and call people to 'repentance and good works' (Klausner 1925:313).

What actually did happen in Jerusalem was not expected. On the eve of Passover, Jesus was arrested and taken to the High Priest and then to Pilate. He was sentenced to death by crucifixion. Klausner comments: 'Here ends the life of Jesus, and here begins the history of Christianity' (Klausner 1925:355). Since he does not accept 'Christianity's' account of what happened after the crucifixion, he offers his own rendition.

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body. Klausner says this was 'probably at the request of the disciples' (Klausner 1925:355). After the burial, Joseph apparently had second thoughts about using his family's tomb. He 'thought it unfitting that one who had been crucified should remain in his ancestral tomb'. Because of this, he 'secretly removed the body at the close of Sabbath and buried it in an unknown grave' (Klausner 1925:357).

Klausner's version adds a unique nuance to this theory. It also raises its own set of questions. For example, why would Joseph agree to bury Jesus in the first place? If he himself was not a follower, there is no reason to think he would comply with the disciples' request. Montefiore and others suggest it was simply to guard against the curse of the land that would have occurred if a body went unburied on the Sabbath. But, Klausner does not comment on this. Conversely, if Joseph was a disciple it is difficult to believe he would have thought it 'unfitting' to place Jesus in his family's tomb, and therefore he would have had no reason to remove the body.

Klausner continues his narrative. The women and the disciples arrive and discover the empty tomb. At some point after this – and perhaps because of this – they all have visions of Jesus. At first, he does not wish to entirely dismiss the visions. He believes that they were definitely real, but that they were 'spiritual and not material' in nature (Klausner 1925:359). There must have been something real, he reasons, since the faith of millions lasting for nineteen hundred years 'is not found in deception' (Klausner 1925:359). This part of the story is also discussed in his next book, *From Jesus to Paul*, although here he is less sympathetic. The disciples, he now writes, had visions because

they were 'enthusiastic to the point of madness and credulous to the point of blindness' (Klausner 1943:256).

His view of Paul is important because he saw him as quite Jewish, long before this view was prominent among scholars. He acknowledges that Paul was, in fact, a student of Gamaliel (Klausner 1943:307). He was highly educated, unlike the fisherman who originally followed Jesus. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus (as recorded in the New Testament) must likewise be reinterpreted. Many scholars have offered psychological explanations for Paul's transformation. But, Klausner's attempt is once again distinct.

He first asks whether or not Paul could have known Jesus prior to the crucifixion. It is possible, he says, that Paul could have at least seen Jesus during his lifetime. Klausner's imagination perseveres, and he suggests that Paul could have even been a witness at the crucifixion. This possibility, combined with Paul's memories of the stoning of Stephen, might have had a revolutionary impact on his life: 'These two fearful events [the crucifixion and the stoning of Stephen] haunted him, and in conjunction with an involved psychological process brought about the vision on the Damascus Road' (Klausner 1943:316).

Klausner's books remain extremely important to the modern Jewish study of Jesus. He was often quite lucid and scholarly. Yet, as with a number of other critical scholars – both Jewish and Gentile – his treatment of the resurrection takes a dramatic turn into the realm of unsubstantiated speculation. His general accounts for both the empty tomb and the visions of the disciples are somewhat common, as will be seen throughout this study. But, some of his attempts to flesh out the details are uniquely his own and have not been embraced by other scholars since.

4.1.4 Hyman G Enelow

Hyman G. Enelow was a leading figure in American Reform Judaism. He served as a rabbi and at one point he was the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He was also instrumental in developing chairs of Jewish studies at both Harvard and Columbia. His book, *A Jewish view of Jesus*, appeared in 1920 and offered a very favorable picture of Jesus.

Enelow believed that Jews should be interested in Jesus. The first reason concerns Jesus's influence on the world. 'Whether we like it or not', he wrote, 'Jesus has fascinated mankind' (Enelow 1920:5). The second reason was more personal. Quite simply, 'Jesus was a Jew'. Yet, he was unlike any other Jew who has ever lived: 'He was a man of vision, a revealer, a spiritual perceiver and dreamer, a man who sought to

point out the eternal things of life – the things that mean most in the universe’ (Enelow 1920:42).

Enelow admired the life of Jesus, and was equally impressed by the way he died. Although his death would bring ‘endless agony to the Jew’ (Enelow 1920:61), Jews should nevertheless be proud that Jesus was ready and willing to die in a noble way. Jesus saw his own teaching as an expression of the ‘Jewish religious ideal’ (Enelow 1920:82). He believed himself to be the one to usher in the Kingdom of God. If that in turn meant being the Messiah and God’s son, Enelow reasons, then Jesus indeed thought of himself as the Messiah (Enelow 1920:130).

Enelow believed that the Gospels were written thirty to sixty years after the death of Jesus, and therefore it is doubtful that we have them in their original form (Enelow 1920:64). For this reason, modern scholarship must step in to explain what really happened. He questions the accounts of the trial before the Sanhedrin, since they do not indicate whether it was the full Sanhedrin of seventy-one members, or the smaller Sanhedrin of twenty-three members. Enelow believed that Pilate himself orchestrated both the arrest and the trials (Enelow 1920:146). The questioning of Pilate and the words Jesus spoke while on the cross – specifically his prayer to forgive others – are acknowledged as historical (Enelow 1920:150). From here, legend takes the place of concrete facts.

Enelow believed that ‘Paul was the intellectual founder of the Christian religion’ (Enelow 1920:158). However, he also acknowledged Paul’s great training as a rabbi. Paul was originally hostile to the new movement and this was what first brought him in contact with the disciples. This interaction led him to ‘marvel at their devotion’, think about Jesus for himself, and ultimately come to his own conclusions: ‘Paul’s conclusion was that Jesus was the Messiah, that after the crucifixion he was resurrected, that his resurrection was a sign of his Messiahship, and that Jesus thus had become Savior of the world’ (Enelow 1920:159).

This theory makes Paul the mastermind who invented the resurrection of Jesus. But, Enelow does not explain how or why Paul came to believe this. Perhaps he felt no need to, since it was commonly held in his day that Paul was the founder of Christianity. He does not allude to pagan influences since he believed Paul had a strong Jewish background (although these two are not necessarily mutually exclusive). This begs the question as to where Paul would have gotten the idea of a Messiah who dies and then rises.

Based on Enelow's own parameters, it seems more likely that Paul's belief in the resurrection actually started with the disciples. Enelow admits Paul originally persecuted the disciples. This tells us at least two things about the original followers of Jesus. First, they must have been proclaiming something radical about Jesus (something Paul strongly objected to). Second, they must have been gaining a considerable following (in order for Paul to get personally involved). But Jesus had died on a cross. What other radical message could the disciples have been proclaiming about their (dead) Messiah that would have so angered Paul?

4.1.5 Yehezkel Kaufmann

Yehezkel Kaufman was born in Russia and received his PhD from the University of Berlin in the field of Bible Research and Semitic Languages. After coming to Israel in 1929, he served as professor at Hebrew University (Patai 1971:657). In 1929-1930 he wrote *Exile and estrangement* in Hebrew. Three chapters of this work were translated in English and published as *Christianity and Judaism: Two covenants* in 1988. The second chapter, which will be addressed here, is called 'Origins of the Christian Church'.

Kaufman saw Jesus as a Pharisaic Jew who did not intend to break with Jewish practice. However, 'opposition to Judaism is implicit in his teaching even though he was unconscious of that' (Kaufman 1988:51). Jesus was a teacher of the law, he came to fulfill the law, and he also 'held himself to be a unique being', namely the Son of God (Kaufmann 1988:52). His disciples, too, believed that there was 'a divine element in Jesus' nature', although he himself was not divine. This belief ordained Jesus to forgive sins and cast out evil spirits. For Kaufmann, notions that Jesus was merely a 'preacher and teacher' only 'falter and fail' (Kaufmann 1988:72). He was somehow more than that.

Jesus also claimed to be the Messiah, but his claim was considerably different from others in his day, as well as others who would appear in later history. His mission was to proclaim the kingdom of God. But, he was much more than a herald, he was also to be the reigning king. His vision was that of the 'apocalyptic redeemer-messiah'. This was based on an amalgamation of Jewish eschatological beliefs that emerged in the late Second Temple period (Kaufmann 1988:74-79). The kingdom of Heaven was not a 'religious-moral-psychological concept' but rather 'an apocalyptic kingdom, which was destined to come at the time appointed, at the "end" which had been fixed from the beginning'. The 'foundation stone' for these beliefs was the resurrection of the dead (Kaufmann 1988:89).

Along with these eschatological views was another that made Jesus unique. He required belief in himself. No other teacher or prophet spoke in such a manner. The miracles he performed were to point others to his power.

To Jesus, therefore, the lack of faith in him and his mission to destroy the kingdom of Satan and the demons who cause men to sin and afflict them in body and soul was a mortal sin which beset the whole generation. He did not distinguish between faith in God and belief in his own “power.”

(Kaufmann 1988:102-103)

Jesus went to Jerusalem on Passover to inaugurate his kingdom, specifically to establish the ‘monarchy of David’. Kaufmann rejects the traditional view, which claims that Jesus went to suffer and die and bring atonement. This was not part of Jesus’ eschatological beliefs (Kaufmann 1988:108-109). The details of the arrest are not given, but he does believe that the trial before the Sanhedrin really happened and that Jesus did affirm that he is the Messiah. The New Testament’s description of these events, however, is ‘inexact’ (Kaufmann 1988:121).

Jewish scholars, Kaufmann writes, have often tried to shift the full blame to the Romans. He admits that the crucifixion was a Roman punishment, and that the Romans were certainly involved. But, he also believed that ‘according to Jewish law, Jesus was liable to the death sentence’ (Kaufmann 1988:123). He cites Deuteronomy 18:20-22, where a prophet is to be examined by demonstrating a sign to exonerate himself. This is what happened at the trial (Mt 26:63-64). Jesus’ ‘refusal’ to offer a sign was seen as evidence that he was ‘a false prophet, which meant that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy’ (Kaufmann 1988:125).

Jesus never wavered in his belief of being the Messiah. Even at the cross, he expected to be rescued. His disciples, on the other hand, lost hope in their Master and fled. The ‘sudden catastrophe’ of the crucifixion negated all hopes and ‘seemingly put an end to the movement’ (Kaufmann 1988:133). This would not last.

But on the third day after the crucifixion, there occurred the event which would determine the course of development of Christianity: The body of Jesus vanished from the grave. Just how this happened is unknown, but the disappearance of the corpse was certainly the occasion of the renewal of the messianic movement.

(Kaufmann 1988:133)

Kaufmann credits the empty tomb for the original belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Other scholars maintain that the visions of Jesus were responsible for establishing their faith. Kaufmann disagrees, since the event was considered a miracle and it ‘brought renewal of faith after the disappointment of Golgotha’ (Kaufmann 1988:133). The appearance of a mere spirit or ghost could not have had such an effect.

He briefly attempts to explain why the grave was empty. Perhaps it was ‘like thousands of instances of “rebirth” of the dead’ which have occurred throughout history. Maybe

Jesus did not die on the cross but merely lost consciousness, 'and then revived and rose from his grave and fell in some other place' (Kaufmann 1988:133). Whatever the reasons, the 'legend of the resurrection' brought a renewed hope and many 'beheld' Jesus. This new movement constituted a sect within Israel, only to later be broadened and disseminated to the gentiles by Paul.

4.1.6 E R Trattner

Ernest Trattner was a Reform rabbi and scholar. His 1931 book, *As a Jew sees Jesus*, was passionate about the Jewishness of Jesus.

For Jesus was born a Jew; he lived on the ancestral soil of Palestine, never once setting foot on alien territory; he taught a small group of disciples all of whom were as Jewish as he; the language he spoke dripped with Jewish tradition and lore; the little children he loved were Jewish children; the sinners he associated with were Jewish sinners; he healed Jewish bodies, fed Jewish hunger, poured out wine at a Jewish wedding, and when he died he quoted a passage from the Hebrew book of Psalms. Such a Jew!

(Trattner 1931:1)

After introducing this pedigree, Trattner asks why Jesus has remained a stranger to the Jewish world. The answer, of course, is because of the centuries-old persecution done in his name. It is only Christianity's recent 'rediscovery of its oriental Master' (Trattner 1931:11) that has enabled Jewish people to begin a new discussion. The search for the historical Jesus has invariably uncovered a Jewish Jesus. Therefore, the historical Jesus must be 'rescued' from church dogma. Trattner then surveys the literature of the previous decades to cite examples of both positive and negative views of the Jewishness of Jesus. 'Even at this late date', he writes, 'few people really know that the language of Galilee was Aramaic' (Trattner 1931:28).

Trattner addresses Jesus' own belief in his messiahship. He is at first agnostic, saying that 'one cannot penetrate the mind of the Nazarene deeply enough to find exactly what he thought of himself' (Trattner 1931:66). Two pages later he reveals that, "it is more probable than not that Jesus regarded himself in some sense as the Messiah' (Trattner 1931:68). Finally, when the High Priest asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, Trattner accepts that Jesus responded in the affirmative (Trattner 1931:133). Ultimately, Jesus was not identified as strictly a Pharisee, Sadducee or an Essene. Like all men of 'lonely greatness', he was 'outside of every party label' (Trattner 1931:102).

Trattner believed that the Gospels were originally oral traditions that were later passed down in different forms. This means that we do not have a 'clear portrait' of his life, but only a 'fragmentary impression' (Trattner 1931:114). Trattner acknowledges that Jesus was handed over to Pilate and that the crucifixion happened. After this, 'the Christian

oral tradition began to take shape' (Trattner 1931:134). The apostle Paul now becomes the chief architect of these new traditions.

Trattner does not deny Paul's Jewishness, but believed that his 'experience within Judaism does not seem to have been a natural or healthy one' (Trattner 1931:142). Paul is then charged with borrowing the concept of a resurrected god from pagan Roman religions. This was how and why the early church came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Because of this, Trattner and others of his day could embrace the Jewishness of Jesus, but reject many of the issues in the New Testament deemed un-Jewish (pagan). He writes no specific comments about the resurrection, but offers the following general conclusion: 'The supernatural Jesus of the gospels is a dated figure. He is the product of the first century A.D., when the pagan world believed in savior-gods, virgin births, incarnations, healing miracles and the atoning effect of sacrificial blood' (Trattner 1931:156).

4.1.7 Schalom Ben-Chorin

Schalom Ben-Chorin was born in Germany and moved to Israel in the 1930s. He then lived in Jerusalem for the next six decades, and was very much a philosopher and free thinker. In 1967 he published the original (German) version of *Brother Jesus*, but the English translation (which will be discussed here) did not appear until 2001. The title is an allusion to Martin Buber's famous words and similarly conveys Ben-Chorin's empathy and admiration of Jesus.

This book was an attempt to interact with 'the rabbi from Nazareth' and not the 'Christ of the Church' (Ben-Chorin 2001:vii). Following the lead of Leo Baeck, he believed that the New Testament must be seen as 'a document of the history of the Jewish people' (Ben-Chorin 2001:4). He admits that by studying the Gospels his own 'path in life' has led him closer to Jesus. Although to do so, he believed, one must make an effort to 'recover Jesus' picture from the Christian overpainting'. Specifically, he did not believe that Jesus thought of himself as the Messiah (Ben-Chorin 2001:7).

Ben-Chorin does however regard the teachings of Jesus quite seriously. For him, they represent a Jewish voice that has not been heard by his own people. His words should be given a place next to other great sages of the period. 'I see in Jesus of Nazareth a third authority', he said, 'whose views are to be placed alongside Hillel and Shammai' (Ben-Chorin 2001:10). Along with his teachings, his very life should be seen as both an example *for* the Jewish people, and *of* the Jewish people.

Is not the suffering Jesus, the Jesus scorned as he hangs dying on the cross, a likeness for his entire people who, tortured and bloodied, have been hanged time and time again on the cross of anti-Semitism? And is the Easter message of the resurrection not a

parable for postwar Israel, which has risen out of the abasement and disgrace of the darkest twelve years in its history to a new incarnation?

(Ben-Chorin 2001:19)

The basic story of the life of Jesus is acknowledged as historical. However, Ben-Chorin discards the supernatural, as well as events that point to Jesus being the Messiah. His reconstructions, like many critical attempts, are sometimes fanciful. They include, in the words of Amy-Jill Levine's review of this book, 'highly conjectural historiography' (Levine 2005:223). For example, he believes that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem happened at the Feast of Tabernacles (Ben-Chorin 2001:113), although the trials and crucifixion did occur during Passover.

After the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea – along with Nicodemus – received the body from Pilate and performed the burial. The women came to the tomb on Sunday and found it empty. At this point, echoing Klausner, he states: 'Here ends the story of Jesus. Here begins the story of Christ' (Ben-Chorin 2001:187). The empty tomb is seen as the pivotal evidence that caused the disciples to believe in the resurrection. They 'construed the disappearance of the body of Jesus as a resurrection' (Ben-Chorin 2001:187).

Ben-Chorin takes a brief moment to mention others who have attempted to explain away the empty tomb. These include the *Toledot Yeshu*, Herman Samuel Reimarus, Hugh Schonfield and Werner Hegeman (Ben-Chorin 2001:187). He did not want to give too much attention to these, since 'speculation contends faith' (Ben-Chorin 2001:187). The empty tomb remains an enigma. Skeptics cannot explain it away, and yet the fact that it caused the disciples to believe in the resurrection was not enough for him. He concludes with the following: 'The resurrection of Jesus cannot be apprehended as a historical phenomenon. Even in the gospels its documentation is insufficient to merit factual status: ultimately we know nothing about what happened after the burial of Jesus' (Ben-Chorin 2001:188).

This statement is misleading in light of what was just said. Ben-Chorin already admitted that there was an empty tomb, and that this caused the disciples to believe in the resurrection. To then say we know 'nothing' about what happened after the burial is, at best, an exaggeration. He continues with another theory that explains the origin of the belief in the resurrection. As was popular, and convenient in his day, he blamed Paul: 'The actual historical resurrection of Christ took place only later in Damascus, with Paul's "Damascus Road" conversion, an experience rooted deeply in the subjectivity of this contradictory and controversial personality' (Ben-Chorin 2001:187-188).

Both the empty tomb and Paul's experience are credited with causing the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. It is not clear if Ben-Chorin abandoned the former in favor of the

latter, or if he simply did not notice that there was a discrepancy between the two suggestions (they cannot both be the original cause). Either way, it did not seem to be a major concern for him. Ben-Chorin's final thoughts are optimistic. Although he denies the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, he nevertheless believed that 'he has risen time and time again in the souls of men and women who have encountered him' (Ben-Chorin 2001:188).

4.1.8 Ellis Rivkin

For many, the crucifixion immediately raises the issue of blame. Who is responsible for the death of Jesus? But, this is perhaps the wrong starting point. Ellis Rivkin reframed the question, and offered an answer, in his book *What killed Jesus?* His entire approach to the study of Jesus is unique. Rather than begin with the New Testament and then decide which parts are credible, he takes a completely different route.

Rivkin, who taught for fifty years at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, begins his study by rejecting the New Testament altogether. This is because it is 'penned with faith, written with passion, and bristling with hostility and resentment' (Rivkin 1984:16). A better place to start, he says, is in the works of Josephus. In this he follows the writings of his mentor, Solomon Zeitlin. Both writers favor Josephus because they believe his writings are more historically accurate than either the New Testament itself or any other extra-biblical literature.

Josephus specifically wrote about the High Priest Annas, John the Baptist, and 'James the brother of Jesus'. Some scholars have questioned the reference to James and Jesus, saying it may not actually be referring to the famous Jesus of Nazareth. But Rivkin is convinced that it does. 'Clearly', he wrote, 'no further explanation was necessary, since every cultured Greek and Roman who might read Josephus' *Antiquities* would have known about the Christians' (Rivkin 1984:66).

Rivkin sees in John the Baptist a remarkable charismatic figure. But after John's death, no one continued to follow him or proclaim his merits. He then ponders what type of person would be able to sustain a following even after his death. It is this question, combined with the historical background provided by Josephus, which enables him to construct an idealized person whom he calls the 'charismatic of charismatics'. Such a man 'must have fused within himself the wonder working charisma of an Elijah, the visionary power of an Isaiah, and the didactic persuasion of a Pharisaic sage'. He continues the description as follows: 'To outlive death itself, he would have had to feel the sufferings of the poor, experience the humiliation of the degraded, sense the loneliness of the outcast, taste the despair of the sinner, and envelop all who came

within his shadow his graciousness, compassion, and undemanding love' (Rivkin 1984:72).

The 'charismatic of charismatics' would also have been seen as the embodiment of such biblical concepts as the 'son of man', as well as that of a healer and even the Messiah. This amazing figure would also have preached that 'the souls of the righteous soar up to God the Father, where they await the day of resurrection' (Rivkin 1984:88). Finally, the 'charismatic of charismatics' would have been sentenced to death on a cross. His disciples would have remembered his teaching about resurrection, and this ultimately would have brought them to a new faith: 'Stunned, bewildered, disoriented, disbelieving the sight of their beloved Teacher crucified, would not the eyes of the faithful see what the eyes of the faithless could not – that their Master, their Teacher, their Lord was as alive as he ever had been when he had preached among them' (Rivkin 1984:89)!

This entire re-creation is based on a combination of Josephus's writings and Rivkin's own imagination. He has devised an extremely detailed history of someone ('the charismatic of charismatics') based on very general information. This history is then compared with the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. Rivkin discovers that the two stories actually have quite a bit in common. For this reason, the Gospels may now be vindicated. Because the Gospels agree so much with his own construction, he then refers to them as 'precious sources for our knowledge both of the historical Jesus and of the risen Christ' (Rivkin 1984:109). One of the only points of disagreement between his view and the Gospels is the resurrection itself. And this is a no small thing.

We thus face an unbridgeable chasm – a chasm separating the charismatic of charismatics drawn by a non-Christian historian from the writings of Josephus, and the Jesus who proved himself to be the Christ through his resurrection – a resurrection attested to by his disciples but neither attested to nor believed by any known Scribe-Pharisee other than Paul.

(Rivkin 1984:108)

Some readers might balk at Rivkin's approach, seeing it as implausible to the point of absurdity. Others might see it as a literary device to help him make his point. Yet, for all of his machinations, Rivkin still arrives at virtually the same place as most other critical scholars. The basic plot line of the Gospels is accepted. The crucifixion, however, is blamed on the Roman political system as a whole, thus answering the question posed by the book's title. While many other details are questioned, Rivkin believed that 'whatever the findings of critical scholarship, a triad of facts – trial, crucifixion, attested resurrection – undergird Christianity' (Rivkin 1984:116).

Rivkin also commented on the early beliefs of the movement in two separate articles. Both are found in books of ecumenical conversations. In each case, he shows that faith in Jesus seemed to be against all odds. For example, in the first article he writes about the disciples' belief in him as Messiah. While others made that claim and were not successful, only Jesus had success: 'he did so after the very crucifixion which should have refuted his claims decisively'. He continues,

But it was not Jesus' life which proved beyond question that he was the Messiah, the Christ. It was his resurrection. It was only when his disciples were convinced that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead that they were stunned into awareness that Jesus was the Christ. It was not by virtue of any signs that attended his earthly ministry, but by his resurrection.

(Rivkin 1978:62)

In the second article, Rivkin addresses Paul's belief. Although he originally persecuted the Church, he too would be dramatically changed. This would happen, Rivkin says, in spite of himself: 'He came to Christ because he saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead, not because he wanted to see him risen, but because he could not help seeing him resurrected and alive. What Paul had thought was a blasphemous claim had been transformed for him into an undeniable fact' (Rivkin 1984:92).

4.1.9 David Flusser

In the first half of the twentieth century, it was still somewhat of a novelty for Jewish scholars to write about Jesus. David Flusser was one of the first to write a life of Jesus without specifically stating his own Jewish standpoint. On the other hand, the fact that he taught at Hebrew University in Jerusalem might have been a clue. His book, *Jesus*, appeared first in German in 1968, and was translated into English a year later.

In the midst of a cynical climate of New Testament scholarship, Flusser wrote this book 'to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life' (Flusser 1969:7). The early Christian accounts of Jesus, he wrote, 'are not as untrustworthy as people think' (Flusser 1969:8). For example, the fact that there are limited corroborative accounts should not be a reason to abandon the study. 'He shares his fate with Moses, Buddha, and Mohammed, who likewise received no mention in the reports of non-believers' (Flusser 1969:7).

Flusser saw Jesus as 'a miracle worker and preacher', and he was largely concerned with placing him in his own Jewish context. In his view, Jesus was 'faithful to the Law' (Flusser 1969:46). Departing from most scholars, he believed that much of the material in the Gospels have a Hebrew (not Aramaic) source (Flusser 1969:12). Jesus preached not only that we are on the threshold of the kingdom of God, but also that 'the new age

of salvation had already begun' (Flusser 1969:90). In all areas, Jesus was nothing if not a Jew: 'He was perfectly at home both in Holy Scripture, and in oral tradition, and knew how to apply this scholarly heritage' (Flusser 1969:18).

Many of the events of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem are acknowledged as historical, while some are not addressed at all. He was arrested and taken to the High Priest, although not to the Sanhedrin (Flusser 1969:119). After the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea (who was a member of the 'city council') asked Pilate for the body. He and Nicodemus arranged the burial. For Flusser, 'the fact that two Jerusalem councilors performed the final act of charity to Jesus proves that it would be false to think that the supreme authorities in Jewry had delivered Jesus up to the Romans' (Flusser 1969:120).

Jesus was then sent to the cross to be executed. Many scholars view this as the end of the 'real' history, and what follows after is the stuff of legend. As Flusser wrote earlier in the book, he wanted to separate 'the historical Jesus' from the 'kerygmatic Christ' (Flusser 1969:9). But apparently, whatever happened after the burial was not worth discussing. There is no mention of an empty tomb, nor the disciples' belief that they had seen the risen Jesus. After a brief discussion about the crucifixion, Flusser concludes the book with the following three words: 'and Jesus died' (Flusser 1969:132).

The resurrection accounts are completely omitted; without explanation or denial. Flusser's response to the resurrection was silence. But it was a loud silence. It begs the question of what happened afterwards, and how and why the Church might have gotten started. This topic is somewhat addressed in a later collection of essays about the beginnings of Christianity. The resurrection, he says here, is couched in mythological (although purely Jewish) terms. This leads him to conclude that the event itself must also be mythological.

This entire metahistorical drama is composed of Jewish elements. The fact that passages from the Old Testament, speaking of victory over death and reflecting pre-biblical mythology, are used in the New Testament as an expression of the belief in Jesus' death and resurrection shows the mythic aspect of this metaphysical drama of Christ.

(Flusser 1988:619)

This is hardly conclusive. If the resurrection did happen, it would not be surprising that the writers would have incorporated Jewish symbolism to explain it. This does not challenge the historicity of the event. Its mythic status seems to be assumed from the start without any real discussion. But, Flusser does give one hint as to when belief in the

resurrection began. It comes in the midst of a discussion on the evolving view of Christology.

We can therefore imagine that during the period between Jesus' death and Paul's conversion some Jewish believers, whose Judaism was already strongly remythologized, reinterpreted Jesus' self awareness, the Cross and the belief in his resurrection in the light of their own understanding of the faith.

(Flusser 1969:623)

The belief in the resurrection, then, existed before Paul (although he does not give a date for Paul). The early disciples 'reinterpreted' their belief in the resurrection to change with the evolving view of Jesus. The actual belief in the resurrection itself, according to Flusser, already existed. This makes the belief in the resurrection early, stemming from the original disciples.

4.1.10 Hyam Maccoby

Hyam Maccoby was librarian at Leo Baeck College and later lecturer at the University of Leeds. He wrote several books on New Testament themes, and many of his views are quite extreme.

In 1973 he wrote *Revolution in Judea*. It includes a wealth of background information on both Jewish and Roman sects of the time, but he begins with a familiar question. 'How does it come about', he asks, 'that a religion which borrows so heavily from Judaism has, for the major part of its history, regarded the Jew as pariahs and outcasts' (Maccoby 1973:12). This book seeks to examine the question from a Jewish point of view.

He begins with a discussion about Barabbas, the man whom the Gospels say was crucified alongside Jesus. This figure, Maccoby believes, is crucial to understanding the entire story of Jesus. Ultimately, he believes that later editors invented the Barabbas account as a device to blame the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. For most of the rest of the book he deconstructs the life and times of Jesus. At the end he returns to Barabbas to explain, as the title of chapter nine states, 'what really happened'. Maccoby sees Jesus as a political figure: 'From the moment that he began to preach the advent of the "kingdom of God" he was a marked man, and when he claimed the Messiahship he was in head-on collision with Rome' (Maccoby 1973:101).

Maccoby believed that Jesus was a Pharisee and that anti-Pharisee expressions found in the Gospels are all inventions. He was not only a Pharisee, 'he remained a Pharisee all his life' (Maccoby 1973:106). In fact, Jesus should be counted among the great

Jewish teachers in history. Both Jesus and Rabbi Akiva, he says, 'were Jewish heroes whose significance lies in their lives, not their deaths' (Maccoby 1973:103).

Maccoby's story takes a bizarre turn as he approaches the final days of Jesus' life. He believed that Jesus was arrested (as a political revolutionary) at the end of the fall festival of Tabernacles. He then spent the next six months in jail (Maccoby 1973:167). At Passover, he was brought before Pilate. Maccoby believed that the Sanhedrin trial never happened, and that the story of Judas was likewise invented purely to blame the Jews. This thesis about Judas is continued and expanded upon in Maccoby's book called, *Judas Iscariot and the myth of Jewish evil*. Jon D. Levenson's review found the scholarship lacking. Specifically, he said Maccoby's speculations, 'though always suggestive, sometimes come to resemble a veritable house of cards'. In the end, Levenson wrote, his theory about Judas is 'as unconvincing as it is bold' (Levenson 1992:56, 58).

The account of Pilate asking the crowd who should be set free, and their choice of Barabbas, is likewise 'invented' to further induce Jewish guilt. At the same, this scenario poses a problem, for which Maccoby needs a solution. Throughout the Gospels Jesus is portrayed as popular, admired and applauded by the Jewish crowds. But how can it be, Maccoby wonders, that the very crowd that hailed him as king during his triumphal entry shouted 'crucify him!' less than a week later? The answer pivots on the person of Barabbas, whose first name was also Jesus: 'The Jewish crowd did in fact call to Pilate to release "Jesus Barabbas"; but that was because "Jesus Barabbas" was the name of the man also known as Jesus of Nazareth' (Maccoby 1973:165).

According to Maccoby, the Jewish crowd that hailed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem really did shout for his release before Pilate. The later editors of the New Testament, however, in their attempt to cast blame, deliberately (and falsely) portrayed them as calling for the release of Barabbas. It was therefore Pilate's decision – and not that of the Jewish crowd – to send Jesus to his death.

With his main thesis accomplished, Maccoby had little interest in discussing the resurrection and adds but a few brief comments. Maccoby believed Jesus was crucified in the year 30 CE (Maccoby 1973:169). After his death, Joseph of Arimathea, 'a Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin', asked Pilate for the body and buried it (Maccoby 1973:167). At some point after this, 'Jesus' immediate supporters, the Twelve and a small band of followers, after an initial period of dismay, came to believe that Jesus was still alive. He had been brought back to life, like Elijah, and would soon return to lead a new attack on the Romans which this time would be successful' (Maccoby 1973:168).

In *The Mythmaker*, Maccoby explains Paul's dramatic experience. His 'conversion' was based on the conflict between his pagan background and his disappointment over his own failure at not being a successful Pharisee (see the discussion above). From this, something new was created which would profoundly impact the entire world. Paul's vision of Jesus was 'the epiphany or divine appearance which initiated Christianity, just as the appearance of God in the burning bush initiated Judaism' (Maccoby 1986:104).

4.1.11 Paula Fredriksen

Paula Fredriksen teaches on religion and history at Boston University and Hebrew University. She is distinguished from the others in this study in two ways. She is a convert to Judaism, and she has written two complete books on the life of Jesus. The first book, *From Jesus to Christ*, appeared in 1988. Like Flusser, there is no mention of a specific Jewish approach. She was writing as a historian attempting to reconstruct the life of Jesus. The Gospels, in her view, are 'a self-conscious Christian tradition that deliberately distanced itself from the historical Jewish context in which Jesus had lived and died' (Fredriksen 1988:xii). This book dealt more with theological issues.

In 1999, she wrote *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews*. This follow-up work focused on the historical Jesus. While there is much overlap between the two books, there are also some differences. For example, she acknowledges that her belief in why Jesus died had changed. In the years between these two books, she writes, 'my contemplation of this anomaly has steadily eroded my conviction in my previous conclusions' (Fredriksen 1999:9). This is the mark of an honest scholar, willing to go where the evidence points. It also underscores how capricious New Testament scholarship can be.

Fredriksen's Jesus is 'a prophet who preached the coming apocalyptic Kingdom of God' (Fredriksen 1999:266). This, in turn, has social and political ramifications and would result in his death. Finding the truth is not easy, since one must sift through the layers of tradition and editing. Few events are considered absolutely historical. The most 'solid fact' in her view is his death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate (Fredriksen 1999:8). Following that, 'the disciple's conviction that they had seen the Risen Christ', is to her a non-negotiable. She calls it 'historical bedrock' (Fredriksen 1999:264).

Another important fact, for the purpose of this study, concerns the spread of the new Jesus movement. Some scholars have questioned the extent and origin of the young church. But, Fredriksen accepts the general account recorded in Acts. She acknowledges that the movement went quickly beyond Jerusalem, and that 'evidence abounds' for the new movements 'rapid dissemination' (Fredriksen 1999:236).

The first question that needs to be addressed is, ‘why would the disciples believe that they saw him alive after he had clearly died?’ At first, she is agnostic on the issue, believing that ‘what these disciples actually saw or experienced is now impossible to say’ (Fredriksen 1999:261). At another point, she offers a suggestion:

And finally, the traditions about the resurrection appearances that grew in the wake of this black moment display the power of his closest followers’ commitment to Jesus’ message that the Kingdom really was at hand. That Passover in Jerusalem, they were expecting an eschatological event, the arrival of God’s kingdom. What they got instead was the crucifixion. But then, an unexpected eschatological event occurred: God, they became convinced, had raised Jesus from the dead. Two of the prime promises of the messianic age – the resurrection of the dead and the vindication of the righteous – these men believed they now saw realized in the person of their executed leader.

(Fredriksen 1999:252)

This statement is highly nuanced and needs to be unpacked. Fredriksen is apparently saying the following: 1) The disciples were expecting an eschatological event at Passover; 2) This is based on Jesus’ teaching regarding the kingdom of God; 3) In place of the expected eschatological event, the disciples were faced (unexpectedly) with the crucifixion of Jesus; and 4) It was the disciples’ commitment to Jesus’ teaching (about the kingdom of God) that somehow caused them to believe in the resurrection appearances. In other words, it was not an encounter with the risen Messiah that caused the disciples to believe that he had been resurrected. It was his teaching about the kingdom of God.

This theory raises its own set of questions. For example, the resurrection of an individual was not commonly (if at all) assumed. It went counter to their expectations. Why would so many have believed such an aberration? Also, if the disciples were predisposed (‘committed’) to believing in Jesus, how would Fredriksen explain Paul’s experience? He was equally committed *against* this belief. He is mentioned as part of her discussion of the early church, but without a comment on how or why he personally came to believe. Did he too come to see the fulfillment of these two ‘prime promises’ of the messianic age? Or, was it something altogether different that caused him to have such a dramatic turnaround? Finally, if Paul wrote of a non-physical resurrection, as she believes (see above, 3.4.3), what is the origin of the empty tomb story in the gospels?

Given the disciples’ rock solid belief that they had seen the risen Jesus, why not take this claim seriously? Why is an actual, physical resurrection from the dead beyond question? Fredriksen addressed this issue in another article, in relation to the work of Crossan. She believes that miraculous claims in competing faith traditions cancel each other out (see above, 3.1.2). For this reason, Crossan’s idea that wild dogs ravaged the

body was more appealing to her. Whether or not it is actually what happened, it is at least rational, and therefore within acceptable boundaries of potential belief.

Crossan also said that the disciples did not originally believe in the resurrection. This goes too far for Fredriksen. The evidence for their belief in the resurrection is too solid. She is certain that the disciples really believed it, yet she is equally adamant that she does not.

But, the resurrection is something else. The movement stands or falls with it, and I cannot imagine so many people in the first generation changing their lives so radically without taking them at their word. They were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. If they just thought that he had died but his truth went marching on, they could have said that. But, they didn't; they spoke of resurrection. Please read me correctly: I am not saying that Jesus really rose from the dead because his disciples said that he did. I am saying that they really thought he had.

(Fredriksen 1995:85)

4.2 FOCUS ON THE RESURRECTION

Most of the authors discussed in this section have already been cited widely in the earlier part of this study. Lapidé and Vermes wrote whole books on the resurrection. Segal wrote one article on the historicity of the resurrection, but also wrote extensively about the afterlife in the ancient world, specifically Paul's understanding of resurrection. Cohn-Sherbok's article on the resurrection appeared in an interfaith symposium on the resurrection of Jesus. Cook dedicates a chapter to the subject of the empty tomb, but also comments on all the important aspects of the resurrection.

4.2.1 Pinchas Lapidé

Pinchas Lapidé is the most interesting personality in this whole study. Born in Germany in 1922, he immigrated to Palestine in 1938. For many years he served as a diplomat in the Israeli foreign office, and later was the director of the Government Press Office in Jerusalem. His education included a BA and MA from Hebrew University and a PhD from the Martin Buber Institute for Judaic Studies at Cologne University (Kuhn & Lapidé 1977a). He wrote numerous books, mostly in German. One of his main contributions was in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue, often teaming up with Catholic scholar Hans Kuhn (see bibliography).

In 1975, Kuhn and Lapidé met in Germany for a radio dialogue (it appeared in print two years later). The event was characterized by mutual respect, and yet each participant was forthright in stating his own beliefs and areas of disagreement. Lapidé's view of Jesus was positive: 'My Judaism is "catholic" enough, in the original sense of the word, to find a place for both Spinoza and Jesus, for Philo and Flavius Josephus. I do not see why I should renounce a luminary of Judaism such as the Rabbi from Nazareth merely

because some of the Christian images of Christ mean nothing to me' (Kuhn & Lapidé 1977a:467).

On the question of Christology, Lapidé admits that the ideas of *kenosis* and incarnation were not foreign to Judaism, and that they 'entered later Christianity not from Hellenism, but in fact from certain Jewish circles'. But, this does not mean he was ready to accept the whole package, or even some of it.

With the utmost seriousness, as an Orthodox Jew, I must say that I cannot accept what you call resurrection, kenosis, and *apokatostis*, since this is not suggested by our Jewish experience of God. But, neither can I deny it, for who am I as a devout Jew to define *a priori* God's saving action? To *define* means to assign limits, and this, from a Jewish standpoint, would be blasphemous.

(Kuhn & Lapidé 1977a:481)

Just a couple of years later, he addressed the question more comprehensively in his book, *The resurrection of Jesus*. His conclusion, to the surprise of many, was that the resurrection was an actual historical event. In the introduction, Carl Braaten said such a thing was 'without precedent' and called it an 'ecumenical miracle' (Lapidé 1982:5). Many scholars reviewed the book, but I am only aware of one Jewish scholar who interacted with it – Philip Sigal, a Reform rabbi who also held a PhD in New Testament. Sigal was not convinced that Lapidé believed in the resurrection to the extent that many of the reviewers were claiming: 'After 124 pages we really cannot conclude what Lapidé believes explicitly about the resurrection of Jesus. He says in passing, almost contradicting Braaten's introduction, that the resurrection event "is still controversial, cannot be conceived historically"' (Sigal 1985:26).

Lapidé's argument throughout the book, however, is that there is enough evidence to make a case for the resurrection, and that in his opinion the explanation that fits best is that it actually happened. He is aware that it cannot be proved historically and that there will be differing points of view. As he says in the prologue: 'For that which happened on the "third day" in Jerusalem is in the last analysis an experience of God which enters into the realm of things which cannot be proved, just as God himself is unprovable; it can be grasped only by faith' (Lapidé 1983:31).

In the first full chapter, called 'But if Christ has not been raised...', Lapidé sets the tone by explaining the importance of the crucifixion and the resurrection for New Testament faith. The former is considered 'historically certain', while the latter is controversial. It has 'led from the beginning to doubt, discord, and dissent' (Lapidé 1983:32). Yet, it is ultimately the more important of the two events; 'Without the experience of the resurrection, the crucifixion of Jesus would most likely have remained without

consequences and forgotten, just as were the innumerable crucifixions of pious Jews which the Romans carried out before Jesus' (Lapide 1983:33).

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:14 is proof of how early this belief began in Christendom. Yet, it was always a minority opinion. The reason for this, according to Lapide, concerns the documents themselves. Both Jews and Gentiles were skeptical of the New Testament's description of the event and surrounding circumstances: 'No wonder, in no other area of the New Testament narrative are the contradictions so glaring. Nowhere else are the opposites so obvious and the contrasting descriptions so questionable as in the realm of the resurrection of Jesus' (Lapide 1983:34-35).

Lapide then quotes several New Testament scholars to confirm this point. He also surveys some of the common suggestions for disbelief both in the ancient world and today. These include Paul's lack of knowledge of an empty tomb, the disbelief of the disciples themselves, the 'elaborations' made by each evangelist, and the parallels with pagan deities who were said to also die and rise again (Lapide 1983:35-42).

It is in spite of these arguments that Lapide will make his case. He was well-aware of the negative theories which potentially undermined the historicity of the resurrection. His own view of the New Testament was quite similar to most of the other writers in this study. He believed the Gospels contain a core element of historical truth with layers of later embellishments. Most liberal scholars admit that at least some things can be adduced as historical fact. Lapide will argue that the resurrection is one of these things. Many commentators miss this, he says, because they are not taking into consideration the Jewish context of such a study: 'It is a lack of empathy with the Jewish locus of that original Easter faith whose eyewitnesses and first testifiers were without exception sons and daughters of Israel' (Lapide 1983:43).

The crucifixion seemed like the end of the story. Many followers must have lost confidence and hope. Others may have chosen to flee, perhaps seeing themselves as victims of another false messiah. Still others might have chosen to honor the memory of their great teacher even after his death, much as was done with Rabbi Akiva a century later. All of this would influence the disciples' understanding, as Lapide states in the chapter called 'The must of the resurrection'. He is not using the term 'must' to mean 'illusory wishful thinking'. Rather, he was referring to God's character and His interaction with His people throughout history. He then surveys passages from the Tanakh which allude to the 'third day' (Gn 22:4, 42:18; Ex 19:16, Jnh 1:17, Ezr 5:1, Hs 6:2). This phrase refers to 'God's mercy and grace which is revealed after two days of affliction and death by way of redemption'. It is here that Lapide makes his most definitive statement.

Thus, according to my opinion, the resurrection belongs to the category of the truly real and effective occurrences, for without a fact of history there is no act of true faith.... In other words: Without the Sinai experience – no Judaism; without the Easter experience – no Christianity. Both were Jewish faith experiences whose radiating power, in a different way, was meant for the world of nations.

(Lapide 1983:92)

The following chapter is called 'Traces of a Jewish faith experience'. Lapide again asserts that the New Testament contains 'embellishments' and 'the fiction of later generations' (Lapide 1983:94). But, Jewish scholars of the New Testament, he says, must search for the traces of truth underlying the documents. He then proceeds to explain which events should be considered authentic history.

He begins with a discussion about the women who found the empty tomb. They are mentioned in all four Gospels and figure prominently. A fictitious report would not have invented such detail, given the status of women at the time. These women also went to the tomb to anoint the body, illustrating that a resurrection was not expected.

Another factor concerns the silence of detail regarding the actual resurrection. No human eye saw it, and no one was even present. It would have been quite easy, and perhaps tempting, for later generations to 'supplement' information with embellishments. But, that was not done. This, he believes, is further evidence of the New Testament's authenticity.

Moving to Paul's writings, Lapide focuses on 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. This is the oldest statement concerning the resurrection in the New Testament. Along with other scholars, Lapide believes that what Paul 'received' and then 'delivers' is best understood as 'a statement of eyewitnesses for whom the experience of the resurrection became the turning point of their lives' (Lapide 1983:99). He gives eight reasons to validate this passage's pre-Pauline origins (see above, 3.2.2).

The New Testament also does not promote the resurrection with the fanfare and hyperbole that is common in apocryphal literature. This too lends to its credibility. The evangelists are telling the ordinary circumstances surrounding an extraordinary occurrence. In fact, the Gospels seem to go out of their way to make the resurrection a non-spectacular event. This, he says, is in keeping with Jewish tradition. Lapide takes several pages to illustrate the difference between the Tanakh's frequent brevity and the wordier expounding by later commentators. As he explains, '[o]ften does "a whole mountain of interpretations hang on a hair" (*Hagigah* 10a) of a brief scripture passage, as it is the case with the creation of Adam' (Lapide 1983:103).

In the chapter called 'The pedagogy of God' he focuses on two counterarguments to the resurrection. The first is the 'nonpublic' manner of the event. In other words, why were there not more witnesses? This objection was first voiced by Celsus in the second century, and was also employed by Herman Samuel Reimarus in the eighteenth century (Lapide 1983:116). Lapide sees the limited witnesses to the resurrection as 'proof of its genuineness' rather than a reason to deny its authenticity. Throughout history, God often revealed Himself supernaturally to just one person or a limited few (Lapide cites Daniel 10:7). The relatively small audience of the resurrection is in keeping with the Biblical record. Faith is always a necessary ingredient, he says, and Jewish readers should understand this (Lapide 1983:120).

The next objection advanced in this chapter concerns the 'unoriginality' of the event, specifically in the light of pagan mystery religions. For this, he turns to Maimonides. God, Maimonides wrote, used the pagan practices of the ancient world (such as sacrifices) as a teaching device for Israel. God was bringing forth something new, but used existing forms and experiences to guide and explain. So too, Lapide believed, God could use the pagan beliefs in resurrection as preparation for 'the true resurrection' that would carry the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth (Lapide 1983:122).

Lapide's final analysis may be grouped into three possibilities, as he does in the chapter called 'The "lesser of two evils"'. The first option is that it is an actual event in history. This would then raise the question of whether or not such an event may be recognized underneath the 'layers of legends'. The second option is that it is a myth with no historical support. The final possibility is that the visions of the resurrected Jesus were actually subjective experiences, unable to be confirmed objectively. Such examples exist in the Talmud and throughout history. But, Lapide cannot embrace this third possibility on the grounds that these other examples did not result in changed lives. It is different with the New Testament.

Despite all the legendary embellishments, in the oldest records there remains a recognizable historical kernel which cannot simply be demythologized. When this scarred, frightened band of the apostles which was just about to throw away everything in order to flee in despair to Galilee; when these peasants, shepherds, and fisherman, who betrayed and denied their master and then failed him miserably, suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society, convinced of salvation and unable to work with much more success after Easter than before Easter, then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation.

(Lapide 1983:125)

Based on this, Lapide holds that an actual resurrection is the 'lesser of two evils' for those who are seeking a rational explanation 'of the worldwide consequences of that Easter faith' (Lapide 1983:126). Suggestions of deception – including theft of the body,

a trance or counterfeit miracles – are likewise unable to account for the early faith. Something historical must have happened since the results were historical, he concludes (Lapide 1983:128).

At the end of the following chapter, he quotes several Jewish scholars who have commented on the resurrection. Rabbi Samuel Hirsch believed that God created in the disciples the belief in the resurrection, so that ‘Jesus’ power of hope and greatness of soul should not end with his death’. Rabbi Leo Baeck said his followers believed in him after his death so that it became for them an ‘existential certainty’ that he had actually risen. Samuel Sandmel thought Jesus must have been a special Jew to ‘have been accorded a special resurrection’. Philosopher Samuel Bergman said it is ‘unfounded’ that the belief in an individual resurrection be excluded from Jewish thought (Lapide 1983:137-139).

These scholars (beginning with Hirsch in 1842) represent some of the dominant Jewish views of the resurrection, although none of them commented on the historicity of the event. In fact, in each case the opposite was assumed. But they were all attempting to find a place for Jesus, if not in Judaism then at least as a good Jew. Lapide’s book has taken the reclamation of Jesus to a whole new level. Yet, his ultimate conclusion about Jesus (for Jews) was quite traditional: ‘He was a “paver of the way for the King Messiah,” as Maimonides calls him, but this does not mean that his resurrection makes him the Messiah of Israel for Jewish people’ (Lapide 1983:152). And finally, ‘I therefore can accept neither the messiahship of Jesus for the people of Israel nor the Pauline interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus’ (Lapide 1983:153).

These comments are difficult to understand in light of the New Testament’s repeated claim that Jesus was promised by Jewish prophets and came for the Jewish people. (along with everyone else). Lapide wrote prior to the scholarly interest in the importance of the Jewish background of Jesus. Some beliefs deemed non-Jewish in his day are no longer seen in the same light. Nevertheless, Lapide’s work stands as a monumental achievement. Jewish scholars who study the resurrection will need to interact with this book. It was a profound pioneering effort.

4.2.2 Dan Cohn-Sherbok

Just a few years before the dawn of our current century, British theologian Gavin D’Costa brought together scholars from a variety of religious backgrounds to discuss the resurrection of Jesus. The resulting book was called *Resurrection reconsidered*. Reform Rabbi and University professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok examined the question from a Jewish point of view. A prolific writer – having published several dozen books – he currently teaches at Oxford.

Cohn-Sherbok begins his article by explaining a conversation he had with his wife about the Apostles Creed. He enthusiastically acknowledges his belief in God. After that, he was able to affirm about half of the Creed. 'At the heart of my rejection of these Christian beliefs', he says, 'is my inability to accept the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Traditionally this has been the linchpin of the entire Christian theological edifice' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:185).

After this introduction, he surveys the general belief in resurrection throughout Jewish history, concluding that by the early rabbinic period it became a 'central principle of faith' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:190). But, Jewish opinion for the last two thousand years has clearly rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and this includes his resurrection from the dead. Cohn-Sherbok then mentions Pinchas Lapide as an exception to this long-standing tradition. He sees no 'logical' inconsistency between Judaism's belief in a general resurrection and Lapide's belief that Jesus was personally resurrected.

Examining the issue more closely, Cohn-Sherbok then puts forth an alternative to both traditional Judaism and Pinchas Lapide. He acknowledges that liberal Judaism has questioned the notion of resurrection on modern, philosophical grounds. This has led some to prefer the belief in the immortality of the soul, rather than a resurrection from the dead. Cohn-Sherbok agrees, and sees traditional Judaism's view of resurrection as 'implausible'. The resurrection of Jesus, however, is not dismissed on theological or philosophical grounds. He is simply unconvinced that it actually happened.

The first reason for his doubt comes from the New Testament itself. He specifically cites the 'conflicting records of the gospel writers'. Biblical scholars in the last hundred years, he says, have cast doubt on these records and there is 'no universality of agreement'. On top of this, the New Testament is 'religious propaganda' without corroborative evidence (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:197). He then asks what evidence exists in history, and he explores the faith of the first disciples.

And, even if we could substantiate (which we cannot) that Jesus' disciples really had some experience of the living Jesus after his death, this would not provide conclusive proof that he had been raised from the dead. It is after all possible, indeed likely, that those who encountered Jesus after his crucifixion had nothing more than a subjective psychological experience.

(Cohn-Sherbok 1996:197)

Cohn-Sherbok has offered a sophisticated psychological diagnosis for the disciples, but how did he arrive at this? He admits to knowing virtually nothing about them or their surrounding circumstances. This is like diagnosing a patient without having any knowledge of his or her symptoms. He first says it is not possible to know if they even

had an experience, he then says it is 'likely' that it was a subjective psychological experience.

He next addresses the 'personal religious experience' of Christians throughout history. This too is discarded immediately as inconclusive evidence. 'Arguably', he says, these experiences are 'of a similar character to those subjective experiences of the early Christian community'. This type of evidence, he says, is 'not sufficiently conclusive'. What he wants is 'objective data' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:197). He is not against believing it, he just wishes there was stronger evidence: 'As a Jew and a rabbi, I could be convinced of Jesus' resurrection, but I would set very high standards of what is required. It would not be enough to have a subjective experience of Jesus. If I had voices or had a visionary experience of Jesus, this would not be enough' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:198).

He then gives some details describing what he would need to believe. They include a 'host of angels trailing clouds of glory and announcing his Messiahship for all to see'. It would also have to be public, 'televised on CNN and other forms of the world's media' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:198). It must be 'concrete, objective, observable evidence' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:199). Yet, while he is 'not persuaded' that Jesus rose from the dead, he concludes the article with the following words: 'But I am capable of being persuaded. I wait for the evidence' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:200).

Cohn-Sherbok's request for evidence was unrealistically high. It also went well beyond the boundaries of historical inquiry. He began by asking, 'What evidence is there that such an event occurred as a fact of history' (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:197)? Unfortunately, his historical analysis was dismissive and incomplete. He mentions Pinchas Lapide, but did not respond to any of Lapide's arguments for the resurrection (not to mention the vast literature from conservative Christian scholars who have addressed the question). The evidence he demands is supernatural, thus rendering his initial request for historical evidence superfluous.

Despite believing that very little can be known for sure in the life of Jesus, Cohn-Sherbok does acknowledge a few important details. He believes that Jesus existed, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and that he died and was buried (Cohn-Sherbok 1996:185). He also believes that a movement sprang up which proclaimed his resurrection and has continued to exist throughout history. This is a good start that provides a basic historical outline from which to proceed. It also raises issues that need to be addressed. Since he acknowledges the burial, he needs to interact with the claim of the empty tomb. A complete investigation would also need to explain both Paul's transformation and the origin of his teaching about the resurrection.

The question, then, is not whether the resurrection can be proven beyond dispute by using Cohn-Sherbok's elevated standards of measurement. But, given the historical parameters that Cohn-Sherbok admits – along with a few important facts that he has not addressed – what is the best explanation as to what really happened to Jesus?

4.2.3 Alan F. Segal

Alan F. Segal taught at Columbia University, and he is one of the most important scholars in this study. He has written extensively on Paul, as well as resurrection and the afterlife in the ancient world. In one article for a conference on the resurrection, he directly tackles the question of whether or not it happened. His answer revolves around his argument that Paul's language about the event is different than that seen in the Gospels (Segal 2006:123).

Paul's letters should be given priority since they were written earlier, and this casts doubt on the Gospels' narrative. Also, the empty tomb 'can not be traced in Paul's teaching' (Segal 2006:134). His argument hinges largely on his interpretation of passages from 1 Corinthians 15, specifically 1 Corinthians 15:50. His treatment of this boils down to concluding that 'flesh and blood' must mean something physical. Since 'flesh and blood' will not inherit the kingdom, it is argued, Jesus' resurrection must not have been physical. He explained this in much greater detail in an earlier work (surveyed above § 3.4.3). Segal supplies an impressive amount of sources as background information, both Jewish and pagan, but ultimately does not succeed in proving that Paul espoused a non-physical resurrection (see the discussion above).

Other relevant issues are discussed in his various articles and books. His view of the gospels is seen through the lens of Paul. This is evident in the name of the chapter of his most exhaustive discussion on this topic: 'The Gospels in contrast to Paul's writing' (Segal 2004:441), from his massive study, *Life after death*. That the original disciples believed in the resurrection is not doubted. Segal acknowledges that their belief began soon after the crucifixion. Following Lüdemann, he says that 'the original experience of the risen Christ must have been visionary appearances after death and that they must have started, as tradition has it, on the first day after the Sabbath, Easter Sunday' (Segal 2004:448). This begs the question of what actually happened to cause such a belief. In an earlier book, *Rebecca's children*, he explains that such a belief was not necessarily out of the ordinary.

It is understandable that several of Jesus' followers came to feel that Jesus was resurrected and had ascended to a new order of being. Since ascension and enthronement were common motifs of resurrection stories at the time, especially of stories dealing with martyrdom, it was entirely appropriate to identify Jesus with the enthroned figure about whom he had preached.

(Segal 1986:87)

His endnote cites *4 Maccabees* as an example. Eighteen years later, returning to his book, *Life after death*, he had a different take on this. In his survey of contemporary literature he again mentions *4 Maccabees* and rules out the likelihood of this being an influence on the disciples, at least on its own. The text does equate suffering and the afterlife. But, the comparison is limited. He concludes: ‘there is still a clear relationship between martyrdom and immortality, but the immortality is not resurrection’ (Segal 2004:387). The basis of the disciples’ belief, then, must have had a variety of sources. He writes,

Since Jesus died as a martyr, expectations of his resurrection would have been normal in some Jewish sects. But the idea of a crucified messiah was unique. In such a situation, the Christians only did what other believing Jews did in similar circumstances: They turned to Biblical prophecy for elucidation.

(Segal 2004:427)

He then cites Daniel 7:9-14 and Daniel 12, along with Psalms 8 and 110 as the likely sources which, added to extra biblical sources about the role of martyrdom, ‘produced the kerygma of the Early Church’ (Segal 2004:428). This is an elaborate reconstruction that needs to be unpacked. First, this scenario, at best, explains how the followers came to understand the event, not why they believed in the resurrection in the first place. Second, this combination of contemporary literature and scripture verses is extremely sophisticated. This, in turn, raises more questions: Would these apocryphal texts have been commonly known in the Galilee at all, and specifically among fisherman? And second, even if they were known, how likely is it that this combination of biblical and extra-biblical antecedents – along with an extremely sophisticated midrashic interpretation – would have occurred to these fisherman just a few days after the crucifixion? Even Segal acknowledges that the reaction to what happened to Jesus was ‘absolutely novel’ (Segal 2006:427).

What needs to be explained, however, is the origin of the belief in the resurrection – why did the disciples believe it in the first place? Segal offers several responses to this question in various places throughout his book. One was an appeal to eschatological visions. Just as Paul’s visions were interpreted as ‘the actual presence of Christ and anticipatory of the end-times’, the disciples likely had comparable experiences: ‘I suspect the visions of Peter and even James and the others were similar: They convinced Jesus’ followers that he not only survived in a new spiritual state but that that state was as the manlike figure in heaven, “the Son of Man,” whose reign inaugurated the millennium’ (Segal 2004:448).

Segal often appeals to psychological jargon, specifically ‘religiously altered states of consciousness’ (Segal 2004:392). Yet, Jesus was different and clearly had a unique

influence on people. This is noticed in contrast to John the Baptist and his followers. Something no doubt happened to Jesus and to the disciples, as evidenced by their response. Martyrdom was an important part of the belief (based on the texts mentioned above), but there must have been something more to cause their original belief.

What changes the portrait is not Jesus' martyrdom alone, as John was also martyred. It is Jesus' followers' interpretation of the Easter event. After the Easter events and Jesus presumed resurrection, the Jesus movement began experiencing his presence in their midst. Apparently, people anticipated that John the Baptist might come back, but no one actually experienced it. But, Jesus' disciples experienced his resurrection.

(Segal 2004:393)

This sounds like something more than mere visions, and it also needs to be asked why Jesus succeeded while John the Baptist failed. The original 'Easter event', as he calls it, still needs to be explained. What actually happened? By Segal's own admission, it was something more than a combination of expectations and the mindset of the disciples, as much as he believes that these things heavily influenced their belief. In one other place he makes a remarkable, if obscure, statement about the event. The death and resurrection of the enthroned figure is 'not inevitable' in the biblical narrative, he says. Therefore, the faith of the disciples must have had an additional catalyst: 'It must have come from the historical experience of the events of Jesus' life, not the other way around. The early Christian community, after they experienced these events, found the Scriptures that explained the meaning of the events' (Segal 2004:428).

Segal then jumps into an explanation of the hermeneutics that produced the early church's theology. But, the experience alluded to here is not further clarified. This statement is left hanging. It seems to imply more than Jesus' teaching, and more than subjective experiences by the disciples. Segal is referring to an event, something that actually happened, as he says: the 'events of Jesus life'. The question that remains is a tautology: what possible event in the life (and death) of Jesus could have caused the disciples to believe in his resurrection? The most obvious answer to this question is the one Segal did not want to entertain. Namely, that Jesus actually rose from the dead. In the end, all of Segal's (quite brilliant) hermeneutics and appeals to psychological factors only take him so far. The event of 'Easter Sunday' that caused the disciples to believe in the resurrection of Jesus remains unexplained.

We now turn to Segal's view of Paul's experience. In 1990 he wrote, *Paul the convert*, which offered numerous possibilities of what happened to Paul and how he interpreted it. These were later streamlined and appeared as a chapter in *Life after death* (discussed above). As with the disciples, Segal acknowledges that Paul had a profound

experience. 'Paul is not converted by Jesus' teachings' he wrote, 'but rather by an experience, a revelation of Christ, which radically reorients his life' (Segal 1990:3). Much of *Paul the convert* attempts to explain conversion experiences using social and scientific tools. There was much data but no conclusion.

Segal also addresses the empty tomb and deals with two general issues. The first is evidence for and against it. The second issue concerns the origins of this story. If the empty tomb tradition was unknown to Paul, as he asserts, there needs to be an explanation as to why it entered the gospel documents at a later time. The Gospel of Mark, the shorter ending, is the focus here as it is the first source that mentions the empty tomb.

The empty tomb tradition is first examined in light of the burial account that precedes it. Segal gives a few suggestions and argues for both sides. First, he says that early tradition is 'solid about the experiences of the women on the Easter morning, less solid on the antiquity of the empty tomb' (Segal 2004:447). This is an odd dichotomy that is not explained. The empty tomb tradition might have existed earlier, he continues, and Paul might have neglected it simply because he was unaware of it. On the other hand, the narrative of the burial is 'so manifestly polemical' as to question its credibility. But, finally, he writes, 'Jesus' burial is a stable part of gospel tradition and Paul explicitly said that Jesus was buried' (Segal 2004:447). He does not provide a definitive conclusion on the tomb, other than his overriding belief that Paul's view of a non-physical resurrection makes it superfluous.

The empty tomb account was added, he writes, simply because it was both 'good story telling' (Segal 2004:444) and a 'missionary strategy' (Segal 2004:448). It serves to both flesh out (quite literally) the account of what happened, and also present the message in a form that will help in its promotion. There were no eye witnesses to the actual resurrection. Segal believes this was a 'critical difficulty' for the early Church (Segal 2004:448), and says: 'The empty tomb itself becomes the vehicle for alleviating that dearth of testimonial for the resurrection, as well as the demonstration that the post-resurrection appearances were not hallucinations' (Segal 2004:448-449).

There is no evidence however, apart from Segal's assertion, that the lack of an eyewitness was ever considered a problem. If it was, the empty tomb story would be an obscure attempt to alleviate the problem. Why not just add an eyewitness account? The later gospels, according to Segal, added numerous embellishments to Mark's work. But, they as well did not see the need to provide some type of correction to this alleged problem.

Another advantage of the tomb story, Segal continues, is that it is verifiable in principle. It 'objectifies the issue of confirmation' by demonstrating the historicity of the event (Segal 2004:450). But again, this argument explains how a belief in the physical resurrection may be confirmed or promoted. It does not explain how and why such a belief began in the first place, in light of Segal's belief that Paul and the other disciples originally believed only in a non-physical resurrection.

He proposes one final advantage of the empty tomb story. It denies the idea that Jesus rose from the dead merely as a spirit. This brings the discussion back to 1 Corinthians 15:44, and Paul's use of the term 'spiritual body'. Segal's view is that it was a unique spiritual event, yet it was not physical. Mark's audience, Segal argues, may have misunderstood this subtle distinction and lead people to interpret it as a 'disembodied soul', which would have denied the uniqueness of Jesus (Segal 2004:451). This is a highly nuanced and speculative proposal. But, if Mark was so worried about his audience getting Paul's original message wrong, why would he supply a story that itself went completely counter to Paul's message?

Segal has not accounted for the origins of the empty tomb story. It remains a mystery. In the end, he seems to be aware of this.

The empty tomb has considerable narrative value, even though it does not present us with an indubitable historical truth, like the lack of witness to the resurrection itself. It is always conceivable that, against our best logic, it actually happened. But, even if it did, the story of the empty tomb is not a particularly strong affirmation of the central events of Christianity, especially in comparison to the dramatic and life-changing personal visions of Paul.

(Segal 2004:450)

This is a curious admission. The empty tomb is compared with Paul's radical transformation as being of lesser evidential value. But, the two are not in competition. This is like a defense attorney saying that exhibit A is not as strong as exhibit B. If there is no contradiction, they each remain relevant and the combination of the two makes the case that much stronger. These two issues, in addition to his conclusion that the disciples believed in the resurrection just a few days after the crucifixion – based on something that actually happened in the life of Jesus - should not be missed. Ultimately, Segal's assertion quoted in the introduction of this study is correct. The resurrection cannot be proven historically. But, as far as the historical evidence goes, it does point in that direction, and even Segal's masterful interaction with ancient sources was not able to provide a plausible alternative.

4.2.4 Geza Vermes

Geza Vermes is one of the most important Jewish scholars of the last fifty years. An expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, he taught Jewish Studies at Oxford for several decades, and was the editor of Oxford's *Journal of Jewish Studies*. He has written numerous books about Jesus from a Jewish point of view, beginning with *Jesus the Jew: A historian's reading of the Gospels*, in 1973. His view of Jesus can be summed up as follows: 'The representation of Jesus in the gospels as a man whose supernatural abilities derived, not from secret powers, but from immediate contact with God, proves him to be a genuine charismatic, the true heir of an age-old prophetic religious line' (Vermes 1973:69).

Thirty-five years later, he wrote a book called *The resurrection: History and myth*. This remains the only full-treatment of the subject on a scholarly level apart from Pinchas Lapide's book. He, too, includes a discussion about resurrection in Judaism. Like many modern scholars, Vermes believes that it was relatively obscure in the Tanakh, only to be given more prominence by the later rabbis. He spends the early chapters surveying the Tanakh, apocryphal literature, Philo, Josephus, early rabbinic and even Roman writings. He concludes that there is no specific unified belief about resurrection that influenced the New Testament.

Vermes begins his study of the resurrection of Jesus with a survey of discrepancies he finds in the Gospels. Some of the stories contain elements not found in the other Gospels, he says, while others 'attest details that are irreconcilable' (Vermes 2008:107). These include the number and identity of the women who visited the tomb, the number of persons seen by the women, the number and location of the apparitions and the place where the apostolic mission was conferred (Vermes 2008:109-10). He also concludes that the predictions of his death and resurrections are 'inauthentic' (Vermes 2208:86). Before his own investigation, he admits there are different ways to evaluate this evidence.

To quote the two extremes, N.T. Wright, the learned twenty-first-century Bishop of Durham, author of a disquisition of over 800 pages, concludes that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event. By contrast, the more succinct David Friedrich Strauss, one of the creators of the historical-critical approach to the Gospels in the nineteenth century, declares that "rarely has an incredible fact been worse attested, and never has a badly attested fact been intrinsically less credible".

(Vermes 2008:104-105)

Vermes then surveys the evidence in the gospels, and the rest of the New Testament. Regarding the kerygma, he says it was 'inherited from his seniors' (Vermes 2008:122), but he did not otherwise comment on the early dating of this hymn. Vermes mentions Paul's admission of his own vision of Jesus (1 Cor 15:8), and remarks: 'no doubt his

mystical experience outside of Damascus (Acts 9:3-4)' (Vermes 2008:122). But, nowhere does he comment on why Paul would have had such a vision. By acknowledging Damascus, presumably Vermes was admitting that Paul was once a persecutor of the early followers. The belief of a former skeptic is important evidence, but it is not part of Vermes' discussion. This is a problem with his study, especially since he will conclude that there is not enough evidence.

Vermes sees two main pieces of 'circumstantial evidence' for the historicity of the resurrection. The first is the women who found the empty tomb. They arrived and were told that Jesus was resurrected. The second is the appearances of the risen Jesus to different disciples. In each case, Vermes (along with most critical scholars) sees inconsistencies between the accounts of the four different authors. On the other hand, he also recognizes that there is an element of authenticity in both the testimony of the women as well as the accounts of the appearances.

The evidence furnished by female witnesses 'had no standing in a male-dominated Jewish society'. The differing number of witnesses is a problem, but it is 'clearly an early tradition'. If it were fabricated, he reasoned, the accounts would have included reliable witnesses and uniform details. Despite these acknowledgements, the various reports make it difficult for him to believe. Even a 'credulous non-believer' would likely not be convinced. He says the same about the visions: 'none of them satisfies the minimum requirements of a legal or scientific inquiry' (Vermes 2008:142). At this point, an alternative theory is needed to explain what may have happened.

The section that immediately follows is called, 'Six theories to explain the resurrection of Jesus'. There were actually eight, he tells us, but he discarded the two extremes – 'the blind faith of the fundamentalist believer' and the 'out of hand rejection of the inveterate skeptic'. The six theories, in his words, are as follows:

1. The body was removed by someone unconnected with Jesus.
2. The body was stolen by his disciples.
3. The empty tomb was not the tomb of Jesus.
4. Buried alive, Jesus later left the tomb.
5. The Migrant Jesus (similar to #5, but then Jesus goes to India)
6. Do the appearances suggest spiritual, not bodily, resurrection?

(Vermes 2008:143)

His discussion of these negative theories also yields some of his positive beliefs. In discussing a possible stolen body, he acknowledges that Joseph and Nicodemus performed the 'funeral duties'. Because these two were well known, he reasons, they

could have easily been asked to supply the body. This 'strongly mitigates against' the stolen body theory (Vermes 2008:144). Arguing against the second theory, he continues with this theme. If they disciples went to the wrong tomb, they surely would have checked with Joseph, 'who was apparently the owner of the tomb' (Vermes 2008:146).

He also touches on the suggestion that the appearances were spiritual and not bodily. He first says that the visions were no different from the visions 'of mystics through the centuries' and concludes that 'No doubt the New Testament characters believed in the reality of their visions of Jesus'. This would nullify the need for the empty tomb, which argues against the visions being purely spiritual and not physical (Vermes 2008:149). So, they definitely had visions. There is no discussion (yet) on how their visions should be interpreted in the context of their unique historical context. That will come later in the book.

After discussing each of the alternative options, he concludes that, 'all in all, none of the six suggested theories stand up to stringent scrutiny' (Vermes 2008:149). Therefore, neither the New Testament's account nor the alternative theories can be definitively argued. Vermes presents one final bit of evidence at the close of the book. He does not choose one option over the other, but he changes the question.

After the resurrection, and specifically after Pentecost (fifty days later), the disciples became bold in their faith. There was a radical transformation in their lives as they 'underwent a powerful mystical experience'. These once fearful men became 'ecstatic spiritual warriors' (Vermes 2008:150). Vermes credits the 'tale' of the empty tomb and the appearances as part of the reason for their hope (Vermes 2008:151). These two points were acknowledged earlier, although somewhat halfheartedly. Now, they are not in doubt and they become the cause of a dramatic chain of events. The disciples not only 'proclaimed openly the message of the gospel', but did so with the 'charismatic potency' imparted to them by Jesus. It was a dramatic transformation: 'The formerly terrified fugitives courageously spoke up in the presence of the authorities and healed the sick in public, at the gate of the Temple itself' (Vermes 2008:150).

The reality of this change, he continues, 'opened the apostles' eyes to the mystery of the resurrection' (Vermes 2008:150). Given this, Vermes attempts to bring the whole picture into focus. The empty tomb and the visions 'momentarily illumined their dark despair with a ray of hope'. There were doubts, but their self-confidence was revived 'under the influence of the Spirit' and they became increasingly sure that Jesus was with them (Vermes 2008:151). In the end, 'the helping hand that gave them strength to carry on with their task was the proof that Jesus had risen from the dead'. Finally,

The conviction in the spiritual presence of the living Jesus accounts for the resurgence of the Jesus movement after the crucifixion. However, it was the supreme doctrinal and organizational skill of St Paul that allowed nascent Christianity to grow into a viable and powerful resurrection-centered world religion.

(Vermes 2008:152)

Vermes' argument is somewhat circular. The empty tomb and the visions combined to cause a belief in the resurrection. This belief caused them to experience the presence of Jesus. In the midst of doubts, the presence of Jesus reminded them that the evidence was true, and then confirmed their belief in the resurrection. What first needs to be explained is the reason for the disciples' 'powerful mystical experience'. The empty tomb and the visions are dismissed as not meeting the 'minimum requirements' of inquiry. But, Vermes fully acknowledges these two points and admits that alternative accounts fail. While the amount of evidence *for* the resurrection may be limited, the evidence for the counter position is, according to Vermes, non-existent.

What would cause such a dramatic turnaround, in such a short period of time, especially to an entire group of people? The reason for such a change, according to Vermes, was the disciples' conviction of 'the spiritual presence of the living Jesus' (Vermes 2008:152). But, what does this actually mean? If Jesus was still dead, what type of 'spiritual presence' could have been imparted to the disciples? And why did they go from despondency after the crucifixion to elation just days later? Vermes does not answer these questions, but he concludes the book with an alternative option. He advocates 'resurrection in the hearts of men', which he believes is something available to all people. In words similar to the conclusion of Ben-Chorin, he writes: 'Whether or not they adhere to a formal creed, a good many men and women of the twenty-first century may be moved and inspired by the mesmerizing presence of the teaching and example of the real Jesus alive in their mind' (Vermes 2008:152).

Vermes was a rare Jewish scholar who allowed for the possibility that all people (not just Gentiles) may benefit spiritually from Jesus. But, on what basis is this possible? The New Testament credits the resurrection for bringing about changed lives. If the supernatural element – and specifically the resurrection – is removed, in what way can Jesus be a 'mesmerizing presence'? Also, if critical scholarship declares that most of the events of his life probably did not happen (or that we cannot know for certain), how can Jesus be considered an example for us? What did he do that we should emulate?

Geza Vermes' belief about Jesus is complex. He dismisses much of the New Testament as myth, yet he strongly believes that some things can be known about Jesus. But, where does he stand on the resurrection? Officially he is agnostic, but he does admit the following: 1). Jesus died on the cross and was placed in a tomb owned by Joseph of

Arimathea; 2) The tomb was later found empty 3) The disciples' belief in the resurrection goes back to an early source (even if discrepancies prevent us from knowing the precise details); 4) Alternative attempts to explain away the resurrection are lacking in credibility; 5) The disciples became radically transformed people who boldly proclaimed 'the gospel'; 6) Paul had some type of mystical experience outside of Damascus (which may allude to the acknowledgement that Paul was a persecutor turned believer), and 7) In some way, Jesus' life and teaching can bring inspiration even today.

The title of his book (*History and myth*) refers to his understanding of the New Testament documents. He believes they are a mixture of facts and legendary material. Other scholars use this assumption to automatically discredit the authenticity of the New Testament, and therefore assume that the resurrection could not be historical. But, Vermes was attempting to look more closely. And although his final position was non-committal, he has nevertheless written a remarkably positive case in favor of the resurrection.

4.2.5 Michael J. Cook

Michael Cook is an important voice in this study, as has been seen in his contributions in several sections of the previous Chapter. His book, *Modern Jews engage the New Testament*, comments on all the relevant aspects of this discussion. Its main contribution is an entire chapter on the empty tomb. It is important, first, to understand his unique approach to the New Testament. He instructs his readers to look for and understand the 'gospel dynamics' that each author used to create his work. He gives the following definition: "Gospel dynamics" are those skillful techniques – evinced in the Gospels – by which early Christians molded their traditions to address their needs decades after Jesus died' (Cook 2009:83).

Cook is not concerned with helping his readers find the historical Jesus. This is not the purpose of his book. The possibility that a certain passage may be harmonized, vindicated or found to be early and authentic is virtually beyond question. What matters is explaining why each passage was created. The reasons, according to Cook, may range from ignorance to extremely clever conspiracy theories on the part of the final author or editor of each Gospel.

He begins by explaining two models to help understand early Christianity. The first one, called 'Configuration A', refers to the original Jewish followers of Jesus. This movement arose in Israel and would eventually die out by the end of the century. 'Configuration B' refers to the movement that began in the Diaspora. This one combined the early beliefs of the original followers with 'Greco Roman religious currents' and eventually attracted

Paul. He, in turn, would add elements of his own Judaism along with further ideas from 'mystery cults of dying and rising savior deities'. This Paul movement, he says, 'became the nucleus of a Christianity that endured' (Cook 2008:35). The Gospels, since they were written after Paul's writings, present Jesus through the lens of 'Configuration B' Christianity.

The accounts of the crucifixion are questioned, but he does acknowledge that Jesus died in approximately 30 C.E. (Cook 2008:34). In his summary of 'Configuration A' Christianity, he gives a few bare facts that are perhaps all we can know about the original Jesus movement. It was

an outgrowth of a small number of Jews remaining impacted by, and committed to, teachings of Jesus, to their companionship, interactions, and exchanges with him, and to their consequent belief that he was the Messiah. They admitted that he did not conform to the then political expectations for this figure, and at first were demoralized by his crucifixion. But they rebounded through faith that he rose from the dead and would imminently return to complete his mission.

(Cook 2008:35)

Cook affirms that belief in the resurrection began with the original disciples. They were 'demoralized' by the crucifixion, and yet for some reason were dramatically changed because of their belief in the resurrection. This needs to be explained. Cook does not spend much time on this issue, and says it is 'beyond historical reconstruction' (Cook 2008:158). However, in an endnote, he offers the following suggestion.

Did belief in Jesus' resurrection arise among his followers from their struggle with cognitive dissonance: that Jesus died without accomplishing his messianic mission? Then, to address this dis-confirmation, did they come to believe that Jesus' presence still (so to speak) "abode among them" *spiritually*? Then, when circulated, was this misconcretized [sic] into word of physical appearances – first to those worthy (as the kerygma specifies)?

(Cook 2008:324 emphasis in the original)

Cook then dedicates a whole chapter to the empty tomb. Along with Segal, Cook believes that Paul's language (specifically 1 Cor 15:44 and 50) alludes to a non-physical resurrection. This point is taken for granted and not explained. His discussion of the tomb begins with an elaborate reconstruction of the Joseph of Arimathea narrative. It provides a good example of his 'gospel dynamics', his interpretive grid. He writes: 'From what other source(s), besides Mark, did the latter Evangelists draw their special details? I believe Mark was their only source on Joseph. Additions by Matthew and Luke (even John) could result primarily from deductions that they drew from Mark, some erroneously so' (Cook 2009:149).

He gives one example of an erroneous deduction based on Mark's Gospel. Matthew and Luke might have misunderstood Mark when he said Joseph was 'seeking the kingdom'. This may not have meant that Joseph was a disciple, Cook argues, since Pharisees were also seeking the Kingdom. Therefore, Matthew's designation of Joseph as a 'disciple' may be an example of how and why he added additional, erroneous information (Cook 2008:151). The possibility that both Matthew and Luke (and perhaps John) all misunderstood Mark in the same way is quite an assertion. To validate this, Cook needs to provide a feasible explanation as to how the others inferred incorrectly, and what Mark actually meant in the first place. He writes:

But some inferences could be plainly wrong if Mark's intent was to present Joseph as Jesus' *opponent*. As unexpected as this sounds, Mark expressly has "all" those trying Jesus (this would have to include Joseph) condemn him as deserving death (14:64) – and this in a Sanhedrin scene that Mark himself invented (so we must presume Mark planned this out as a consistent piece).

(Cook 2008:152, emphasis in the original)

The reason Mark wanted to show Joseph as an opponent, Cook goes on to say, is in order to show how 'even someone who condemned Jesus' (Cook 2008:154) had acted more like a disciple than the real disciples. This was in keeping with Mark's overall strategy to acknowledge the Jewish roots of the movement, yet condemn the Jews in the eyes of his intended Gentile audience (see Cook 2008:176-191) This position is extremely speculative – notice his words, 'as unexpected as this sounds' – and it rests on the assumption that anti-Jewishness was a foundational motivation of the Gospels. This belief ignores the scholarship of the past three decades, particularly the Jewish scholarship, which has been steadily abandoning such presuppositions (see Section 3:3).

Building on this, he addresses the kerygma of 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 and wonders why there is no mention of the women. Cook believes they were not included because the empty tomb story, like the Joseph narrative, is a later invention. This raises the question why Mark, the first Gospel, has women as the witnesses to the empty tomb. It is difficult to imagine a first century writer fabricating a story where the key witnesses are women. Some have suggested that the women are not included in the kerygma simply because of the embarrassment factor. Cook responds,

I prefer a different explanation, which is that only when Mark himself (ca. 72 CE) introduced the motif that the men ran away did he thereby leave women as the only ones of Jesus' followers in the vicinity to whom the resurrected Jesus could appear – an editorial matter about which those formulating the kerygma, decades earlier, would have known nothing.

(Cook 2008:157)

In other words, Mark's account of the fleeing disciples (which Cook sees as a fabrication in itself) caused him, by necessity, to create the story of the women going to the tomb. This argument has been used by others (Bird and Crossly 2009:60), but, it is especially dubious in Cook's analysis. For him, many of the characters and events in Mark's Gospel are fabrications. While acknowledging that Joseph of Arimathea might have been a real person (Cook 2008:160), he believes that the story about him is entirely fictitious. The same holds true for other people as well. He writes: 'We should not overlook that Mark serves as the sole source (or creator) of half a dozen or so bit players like Joseph' (Cook 2008:152). Assuming this propensity to create characters and actions at will, it would have been much more likely, and simple, for Mark to create one or more male characters to find the tomb.

At the end of the chapter he also explains the reason why an empty tomb story might have originated in the first place. He writes the following: 'if Jesus, after death, was reported sighted, then whatever the place where his corpse had been lain became presumed *vacant*' (Cook 2008:157, emphasis in the original). To modern Westerners, this sounds quite logical. But, the reason it does is that we are already familiar with the story of Jesus. First century observers would have had a much different reaction. It seems that Cook was referring to a pagan, based on two of his presuppositions: the Jewish Jesus movement died out by the end of the century, and the empty tomb story was most likely created either by Mark or shortly before his Gospel was written. But, whether Cook was referring to a Jew or a pagan in his hypothetical situation, the assumption would most likely not have been as he claimed.

The common Jewish view held that the resurrection is a future, end-times event, when all physical bodies would rise from their graves. If someone had seen some type of vision or spirit, they most likely would have assumed that the body was still in the grave awaiting the final resurrection. The pagan view, on the other hand, advocated the transmigration of the soul. This, too, would have led to the assumption that the body was still in the grave (as Segal concluded, 'a bodily resurrection was never any significant part in Greek thinking', Segal 2004:425). The origin of the tomb account is an important factor for those who say it is a much later invention. Cook's thesis will need to at least be clarified in order for it to have any weight.

This brings us to Paul. Many, if not most, critics affirm that Paul believed he had some type of encounter with the risen Jesus. Cook takes a different path. Both Paul's letters and Acts are dismissed as poor sources (Cook 2008:58-68). He does acknowledge that Paul was a Jew who originally persecuted the followers of Jesus. But, his writings about the resurrection of Jesus are not based on his own experience. According to Cook, Paul was influenced by the part of the Jesus movement that mixed the original gospel with

pagan ideas, and this was more influential to his thought than his own biography (Cook 2008:36, see the discussion in §3.5.1).

4.3 JEWISH HISTORY

In the process of writing Jewish history, something needs to be said about the new group that emerged in the first century that began both literally and figuratively on Jewish soil. The authors below wrote major works of Jewish history and all included comments on the origins of the new movement. The lengths range from a few sentences to several pages. But, in most cases, the reason for both the disciples' faith and Paul's faith, revolving around the resurrection, is addressed. Heinrich Graetz, the only scholar in this Chapter who wrote prior to 1900, begins the discussion.

4.3.1 Heinrich Graetz

The first complete study of Jewish history came from Heinrich Graetz in the mid nineteenth century. It was published in six volumes and has continually been in print. Graetz had mixed feelings about Jesus, and was heavily influenced by the German critical scholarship of the day. But for a Jewish scholar his study was groundbreaking. His section on the life of Jesus is over ten pages and he begins by commenting on Jesus' character. Because of his Galilean origins and his native Aramaic, he wrote, Jesus could not have been steeped in the Law. But he had other positive qualities: 'High-minded earnestness and spotless moral purity were his undeniable attributes: they stand out in all the authentic accounts of his life that have reached us, and appear even in those garbled teachings which his followers placed in his mouth' (Graetz 1974:149)

Jesus is described as an Essene although this is said to be speculation. It was to the poor and needy, the outcasts, that he would bring 'the great healing truths of Judaism' (Graetz 1974:152). He had no plan to change Judaism, his goal was to 'redeem the sinner' and prepare him for the 'approaching Messianic time' (Graetz 1974:155). But, he was more than a teacher. He was a worker of miracles. Such stories of 'extraordinary events' and cures may certainly have been exaggerated, he writes. Yet, they 'must doubtless have had some foundation in fact.' (Graetz 1974:156).

Messianic speculation grew and he was forced to go to Jerusalem. The triumphal entry is said to be an invention and the trial before the Sanhedrin is questionable. But, eventually, Jesus appeared before Pilate and then went to the cross. Graetz mourns his death, as one who attempted to bring so much good into the world. Yet, this death would also bring severe consequences for the Jewish people.

The disciples gathered together to mourn for their master. They continued in their faith and were even joined by others. The only problem was the 'shameful death' that he endured. A suffering Messiah was a stumbling block to their movement. It was because of this that one of the followers referred to Isaiah 53 to make the events fit the prophecy (Graetz 1974:166).

After a discussion of the new movement in its earliest form, he comes to Paul. His view was typical of the day, in that he applauded Jesus as a Jew, but had much stronger language reserved for Paul. This trend would dominate in Jewish scholarship for over a hundred years, and can still be found today. For Graetz, Paul was 'excitable and vehement', bitter in his treatment of others who disagreed with him. His Jewishness was spurious as well: 'He had limited knowledge of Judean writings, and was only familiar with the Scriptures through the Greek translation; enthusiastic and fanciful, he believed in the visions of his imagination and allowed himself to be guided by them' (Graetz 1974:223).

Paul persecuted the early followers because they broke with Pharisaic doctrines. In Damascus, he learned that many heathens had gone over to Judaism. This might have caused Paul to wonder if the time was at hand when all nations would recognize the God of Israel. But, Jewish law would be too burdensome for Gentiles. However, his teachers may have told him that the Law was only binding until the Messiah comes. So, if the Messiah had already come, the law would not be necessary for Gentiles (Graetz 1974:224-225).

This reasoning, combined with Paul's temperament caused him to believe that 'Jesus had made himself manifest to him' (Graetz 1974:225). But, if Jesus had died, how could such a manifestation occur? This led to his belief that Jesus had risen from the dead, an event that had been debated by rival Jewish schools at the time. This, in turn, led Paul to believe Jesus was their Messiah, a belief he would passionately bring to the Gentiles along with the claim that they no longer need the law (Graetz 1974:226).

Graetz was the first modern Jewish scholar to interact with both the disciples' and Paul's belief in the resurrection. His position is unique (or, at least rare) also in that he has the disciples and Paul each coming to the conclusion of the resurrection completely independently of each other.

4.3.2 Kaufman Kohler

The Jewish Encyclopedia was the first monumental work of Jewish scholarship to be written in English. It was published between 1901 and 1906 and it included a section on Jesus of Nazareth, divided into three subsections: in history, theology and Jewish

legend. Isadore Singer edited the entire project, but Reform leader, Kaufmann Kohler, wrote the section on Jewish history.

The historical section gives a basic overview of the story with occasional corrections. Jesus was more Jewish than John the Baptist, and he did not directly claim to be the Messiah. In Passover of the year 29 C.E. he went to Jerusalem. After the Passover meal, there was no actual Jewish trial, although Jesus was handed over to Pilate by some priests. He was sent to the cross, where he died. This ends the section on history. However, the resurrection is addressed in the immediately following section on theology. The disciples and the women, it says, 'beheld him in their entranced state'. The apparitions that occurred after the crucifixion were placed within his lifetime as part of the final editing of the Gospels. These include the transfiguration and walking at night as a spirit on the lake. Visions were also experienced of seeing Jesus in the clouds. The reason for such experiences is not explained. But, the theological source of Jesus' teaching is given: 'And so it came about that, consciously or unconsciously, the crystallized thought of generations of Essenes and entire chapters taken from their apocalyptic literature (Matt. xxiv.-xxv.) were put into the mouth of Jesus, the acme and the highest type of Essenism' (Singer 1906).

There is also an entry for Paul in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Like Graetz, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* takes a negative approach to the man from Tarsus. His use of the Septuagint leads the writer to say that he had no familiarity with the Hebrew texts. Throughout his writings there is 'an irrational or pathological element which could not but repel the disciples of the Rabbis'. His 'epilepsy' often put him in a state of ecstasy that similarly caused him to be estranged from the Jews. Ultimately, Paul is declared completely un-Jewish. This is adduced by his Hellenistic upbringing and his 'unparalleled animosity and hostility to Judaism'. Paul's theology is then summarized – 'a system of belief which endeavored to unite all men, but at the expense of sound reason and common sense'.

Regarding the Damascus experience, 'there is possibly a historical kernel to the story'. No details are given. But, Paul apparently had a vision of Jesus who called to him. This stirred up previously held convictions: 'Evidently Paul entertained long before his vision those notions of the Son of God which he afterward expressed; but the identification of his Gnostic Christ with the crucified Jesus of the church he had formerly antagonized was possibly the result of a mental paroxysm experienced in the form of visions' (Singer 1906).

4.3.3 Abram Leon Sachar

In 1930, Abram Sachar published his classic study called *A history of the Jews*. At the time there was a new atmosphere about the study of Jesus, and many Jewish scholars were quite positive about him. There was also the undeniable fact of his influence. The life of Jesus, he wrote, 'was destined to change the history of the world more profoundly than that of any other single individual who ever lived' (Sachar 1930:124).

Although twenty centuries of Christianity have 'obscured his genius', and the New Testament documents themselves are 'untrustworthy' (Sachar 1930:125), Sachar produced a substantial biography. Jesus was first and foremost Jewish. In all that he did, 'there seemed to be little in conflict with Jewish tradition as interpreted even by rigid Pharisees' (Sachar 1930:128). What distinguished Jesus was that he taught in his own name, rather than sighting previous tradition. From here, it was just a small step for him to come to believe that he was the Messiah. This was the reason for his famous trip to Jerusalem, to proclaim his Messiahship at the appropriate time and place (Sachar 1930:130).

In Jerusalem, Jesus' teaching began a revolt that aroused Jewish leaders. The details of the trials that would follow are questionable. However, it is 'incontrovertible' that Jesus affirmed his Messiahship to the Jewish leaders. This would ultimately lead him to Pilate and the cross (Sachar 1930:132). After the crucifixion, the body was 'deposited in a nearby tomb, and a stone was placed at the entrance' (Sachar 1930:133). But this was not the end of the story: 'Then came a miraculous restoration of faith, inspired, according to all gospel accounts, by the resurrection and reappearance of Jesus' (Sachar 1930:134).

Sachar mentions both the women finding the empty tomb, and the visions by them and the disciples. These visions would become 'the corner-stone of the new Christian religion' (Sachar 1930:134). Whatever they were, these visions were not the product of deliberate deceit. The disciples truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah. What then, might have caused such visions? Sachar continues: 'Doubtless their imagination was set on fire when the body disappeared, and they sought no rational explanation (Sachar 1930:134).

The empty tomb, then, was the catalyst that inspired their visions of the resurrected Jesus. Sachar does not attempt to explain how it might have become empty in the first place. The visions that emerged, however, were quite real. The disciples saw Jesus 'as vividly and as truly as Isaiah saw his heavenly visions, and as other sensitive spirits, in exalted religious moods, were certain of transcendental experiences' (Sachar 1930:134). These visions then 'fortified' their convictions, and a movement was born.

As for Paul, he was a Hellenistic Jew who took part in the early disputes with the Nazarene sect, and was responsible for his share of persecutions against them. Sachar also believed that Paul was 'sorely troubled by a sense of sin which no rationalizing and no amount of learning would still' (Sachar 1930:136). He, too, would undergo a dramatic change: 'Then came a sudden vision to him, a tremendous psychological experience, which changed his whole balance. The prophet whose disciples were being persecuted suddenly appeared and opened a new way of life to Paul' (Sachar 1930:136).

Sachar briefly attempts to find an alternative explanation for Paul's radical turnaround. Perhaps it was caused by Paul's failure to influence and win over the persecuted sect. Or, maybe Paul had no peace in Judaism and wanted something more (Sachar 1930:137). Whatever the cause, Paul's own convictions grew and solidified. These beliefs were disseminated and then went on to change the world.

4.3.4 Salo Wittmayer Baron

Originally published in 1937, Salo Wittmayer Baron's series, *A social and religious history of the Jews*, is the definitive single-author work in this field. It covers the entire history in sixteen volumes.

Jesus' teaching, according to Baron, was quite common for his day, and he cites several examples of parallels from the Talmud. One distinction, 'nourished by the ideas of Pharisaic Judaism', was his emphasis on the messianic hope, specifically his belief that it would be fulfilled in his own lifetime. This would have its effect on his listeners, who had already been 'stirred by apocalyptic writers and preachers for many generations' (Baron 1952:68). It would also help make sense of his death.

Jesus' crucifixion at first stunned his disciples. Much as they may have cherished the literary recollections of Deutero-Isaiah's suffering Servant of the Lord and believed, with the author of Fourth Maccabees, that individual could through suffering atone for the sins of their fellow men, they like most other Palestinians Jews, could not quite divorce their vision of the advent of the messiah from that of a visible final triumph over all enemies.

(Baron 1952:71)

Here we have a rare acknowledgment of a redeemer in Jewish thought whose suffering would atone for sin. This provided the theological justification. Although some of the disciples had lost faith, one occurrence would rally the group: 'Not until they had the vision of Christ resurrected did the other apostles regain their composure and resume their mission' (Baron 1952:71). The resurrection, along with the crucifixion and Last Supper, were combined to provide 'an answer to the riddle of its founder's agonizing death' (Baron 1952:72).

This is the first of Baron's three stages of early Christianity. The second would take the movement a step away from its original Palestinian roots, only to make way for the third and decisive change: the Catholic Church.

The transition from the first to the second stage is stated succinctly: 'At this crucial moment Paul assumed the Leadership' (Baron 1952:76). There is no mention of his life before he became a follower of Jesus, nor how he came to believe. His own contribution would come 'not through a process of systematic thinking, but by lending expression to his high-strung emotions and by seeking in creative fashion the reconciliation of his own Jewish and Hellenistic heritages'. This included his views on 'pagan mysteries of salvation' (Baron 1952:76).

4.3.5 Solomon Grayzel

In 1947, Grayzel published his own thorough study of Jewish history. He saw Joshua (as he called Jesus) as a disciple of John the Baptist. It was after John's death – and perhaps somewhat because of it – that Joshua began his own ministry. This was marked by calls to repent, preaching and healing the sick (Grayzel 1947:131).

Grayzel believed that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah during the trial before the High Priest. This led to Pilate, the crucifixion and the burial. Joshua's friends 'bribed the Romans to give his body to them' (Grayzel 1947:135). They received the body, placed it in a cave and covered it with a rock. The plan was to return at a later time for a proper burial. The group scattered, but one among them returned to the cave and found it empty; 'The body had mysteriously disappeared' (Grayzel 1947:135). For those who expected a miraculous deliverance, and who had been taught that the coming Messiah meant the resurrection of the dead, Grayzel explains, 'it was not impossible to see a miracle in the emptiness of the cave' (Grayzel 1947:135).

A few years later, enter Paul. He was a devoted Jew who was 'incensed' by the teachings of this new group. But then something intense happened to him as well. 'In a flash' Paul had the idea that Judaism might be divided into two parts: law and ideals. The former would suit the Jews in Judea, and the latter would benefit the Gentiles (Grayzel 1947:151). Paul became convinced of this, and, 'characteristically, became terribly earnest about convincing others' (Grayzel 1947:152).

4.3.6 Cecil Roth

Cecil Roth's 1961 book, *History of the Jews*, contains just a few pages about Jesus. Uniquely, his discussion of both the disciples and Paul's experience says nothing about the resurrection. The following facts are given as a backdrop for the discussion: '[I]n the year 33 C.E., a popular religious revivalist from Galilee named Joshua (Jesus), who laid

claim to Davidic descent, was crucified on Passover eve, after a summary trial, by the nervous administration' (Roth 1961:101).

Although others had claimed to be the Messiah, without success, the followers of Jesus would not abandon their faith. The crucifixion did not impede them as might be expected. For some reason the faith lived on. For this reason, Roth says, 'his personal magnetism must have been amazingly great' (Roth 1961:141). His followers continued to cherish his memory. Sometime later, the movement took a radical turn because of one specific event. Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus and 'suddenly became convinced of the Messianic claims of the dead leader, whose followers he had strenuously opposed before this' (Roth 1961:141).

4.3.7 Martin Goodman

The interaction between Jews of antiquity and the Roman Empire is an exciting and compelling story. It is the focus of Martin Goodman's popular book, *Rome and Jerusalem*. In the midst of the clash between these two great civilizations, another significant group would emerge. 'It is a remarkable fact', he writes, 'that one movement which began in Jerusalem in the first century CE came by the fourth century to govern the world-view of those who held power in Rome' (Goodman 2007:512). Indeed, the origins of this movement need to be addressed.

Goodman is a professor at Oxford who specializes in Jewish history in the Roman world. He believes very little can be known about Jesus because of the 'contradictions between the multifarious tales' (Goodman 2007:513), referring to both the canonical Gospels and other sources. Yet, he does believe some things can be known. For example, Jesus was a Jew who probably came from Galilee, he was a teacher (although what he taught is debated), and he eventually died on a cross in Jerusalem under the governorship of Pontius Pilate (Goodman 2007:514-515) His followers continued their faith even after the crucifixion, as Goodman explains: 'What lead these Jews to affirm their faith in Jesus must have been mostly memories of his ethical teachings while he was alive and the eschatological fervour which had accompanied his preaching of the Kingdom of God' (Goodman 2007:516).

Goodman does not mention the disciples' belief in the resurrection at this point (nor does he deny it). Rather, Jesus' ethical teachings are credited with bolstering their faith. This raises two questions. First, which of his ethical teachings might have had the power to cause the disciples to rebound so dramatically after the devastation of the crucifixion? Second, if the disciples were merely remembering his ethical teaching (and not promoting the resurrection), what was it about the disciples that Paul found so disturbing? As for the 'eschatological fervour' of his preaching, it is difficult to see how

this would have been sustained in light of Jesus' death, unless they also believed in his resurrection. Goodman next explains what happened to Paul:

Shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus, he came into contact with some of the followers of the new movement and persecuted them in Jerusalem, but on the way to Damascus as an agent of the High Priest to arrest converts there, he was himself converted on the road by a vision of the risen Jesus and devoted the rest of his life to his work as 'apostle of the gentiles.

(Goodman 2007:517)

4.4 HONORABLE MENTION

The study of the resurrection of Jesus leads to a number of responses, from the clinical to the outrageous. This was demonstrated above. Even scholars who are otherwise sober and methodical may become quite fanciful in their attempt to provide an alternative to the canonical story. Klausner's psychological speculation regarding Paul's state of mind, or Kaufman's suggestion that Jesus might not really have died, are good examples. Maccoby pushed the envelope even further with some of his theories. The authors in this present Section are not necessarily more outrageous, but they are extreme, and also, with the exception of Schonfield, less well-known. They are important for the study, as they represent the total picture of the resurrection of Jesus in the Jewish imagination.

4.4.1 Schonfield

The all-time bestselling book about the resurrection of Jesus was written by Hugh Schonfield in 1965. He was raised in a Jewish home, came to believe in Jesus as Messiah, and then later abandoned his faith completely (Harvey). He wrote several scholarly volumes, but none would be as well-known as the *Passover plot*. This work is described by the author as 'an imaginative reconstruction of the personality, aims and activities of Jesus' (Schonfield 1965:13). It is far-fetched, outrageous and controversial. And yet, in many ways it is not that different from many of the other reconstructions offered by critical scholars.

In Schonfield's view, Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah. This is something he can support, as long as this belief is divorced from the 'pagan doctrine of the incarnation of the Godhead'. This, he believed, would be antithetical to 'Jewish monotheism' (Schonfield 1965:21). Jesus was aware of prophecies that said that the Messiah must die and rise again. This was the catalyst for the plan – the plot – that was set in motion. He would go to Jerusalem and arrange for all that was needed. The plan was kept a secret, even to his closest friends: 'The destined road for Jesus led to torture at Jerusalem on a Roman cross, to be followed by resurrection. But these things had to

come about in the manner predicted by the Scriptures and after preliminaries entailing the most careful scheming and plotting to produce them' (Schonfield 1965:132).

Schonfield then comments on such a scheme. He called it a 'nightmarish conception of the frightening logic of a sick mind, or of a genius' (Schonfield 1965:132). Jesus did his part, and along the way others would become involved as well. Judas realized that his role was to act as the betrayer, and he obediently did what was expected (Schonfield 1965:136). The trials before the Jewish leaders and then Pilate also went as planned. At some time prior to this, Jesus had divulged the plan to Joseph of Arimathea. He too would play a vital role in staging the resurrection: 'Two things, however, were indispensable to the success of a rescue operation. The first was to administer a drug to Jesus on the cross to give the impression of premature death, and the second was to obtain the speedy delivery of the body to Joseph' (Schonfield 1965:66).

This was the essence of the plan. A drug would be used to give the appearance that Jesus had died, although he would merely be in a coma. The Gospels themselves are used to support this theory. For example, the sponge with the vinegar given to Jesus while he was on the cross was said to have the special drug. Also, Joseph went to Pilate to ask for the body. Schonfield points out that in Mark 15:43 and 45 Joseph asks for the body (*soma*), whereas Pilate refers to it as a corpse (*ptoma*). The differing Greek words are cited as evidence that Joseph did not believe that the body was in fact dead (Schonfield 1965:168).

Jesus was placed on a cross and remained there for three hours before being taken down. Schonfield mentions a passage in Josephus that tells of a man who was taken down from a cross and eventually lived (Schonfield 1965:162). However, Jesus was then placed in a tomb for over twenty-four hours. What 'seems probable' is that on Saturday night, 'Jesus was brought out of the tomb by those concerned in the plan' and that he 'regained consciousness temporarily but finally succumbed' (Schonfield 1965:172). It was in those last moments of consciousness, with his final breaths, that Jesus told his disciples that he would rise again.

The next morning, Mary Magdalene and others would find an empty tomb. They would also experience visions of the risen Jesus. Schonfield believes that they must have seen a real person and not merely a series of subjective visions. He accounts for this by saying that it must have been someone other than Jesus that they all mistook for Jesus. He then offers another possibility. He suggests that the man in question was a medium. And it was through this man that Jesus – now in the afterlife – spoke with his own voice. That is why the disciples would have recognized him as Jesus (Schonfield 1965:179).

Schonfield's version of the story is certainly one of the most imaginative. The belief that Jesus even had such a plan is, of course, pure speculation. And being in a tomb would be an impossible place to heal after the torture of crucifixion. Some critics categorically deny the supernatural, and therefore look for alternative options. But, Schonfield actually used the supernatural (the medium) to explain away the risen Jesus. He was not against the supernatural, nor Jesus being the Messiah. He was merely trying, like many others have done, to fit Jesus into his own acceptable mold.

One of the astonishing things about the *Passover plot* (besides the plot itself!), is how optimistic Schonfield is about the whole thing. He sees it as a success. Jesus did the right thing by playing the role of the Messiah. Although he did not actually rise from the dead, he sincerely tried. For this, he serves as an example: 'Wherever mankind strives to bring in the rule of justice, righteousness and peace, the deathless presence of Jesus the Messiah is with them' (Schonfield 1965:181). If nothing else, Schonfield's reconstruction serves as a reminder of how difficult it is to explain away the resurrection without resorting to contrived speculation.

4.4.2 Gaalyahu Cornfeld

Gaalyahu Cornfeld was an archaeologist and writer who lived in Jerusalem and wrote several books. In 1982 he published *The historical Jesus: A scholarly view of the man and his world*. It contains a number of brief articles by his friend, David Flusser, which are interspersed throughout the book. It also includes a wealth of pictures of ancient sites and artifacts that make it an engaging introductory work on the subject.

For most of the book, Cornfeld is more concerned with archaeological issues surrounding the life of Jesus. He has a very low view of how much of the life of Jesus should be considered historical. For him, the 'sole incontestable fact in the life of Jesus' is the crucifixion (Cornfeld 1982:8). Following Vermes, he sees Jesus as a 'charismatic Jewish *tzaddik*' (Cornfeld 1982:13). Since the crucifixion definitely happened, the origin of the belief in resurrection needs to be explained.

Cornfeld uses rabbinic *halacha* to shed light on the burial of Jesus. Quoting from Mishnah *Semahot*, he explains an ancient custom dictating that cemeteries should be visited within three days. According to this source, 'it once happened that a (buried) man was visited and went to live another twenty-five years'. Indeed, he continues, 'experience had taught caution and the necessity for making sure that someone taken for dead was not actually in a coma, or a deep swoon' (Cornfeld 1982:176). This tradition explains why the women went to visit the grave of Jesus. But, by the time they arrived the body was gone.

It had been removed to preserve the life of a man crippled, but possibly not bereft of life by crucifixion. Hence the urgency. This was a case of survival, so strange that it really was miraculous and lent the crucified Jesus an aura of indestructible holiness, even immortality. His followers prefer the latter description.

(Cornfeld 1982:176)

To advance his theory, Cornfeld – like Hugh Schonfield – refers to a passage in Josephus that speaks of a man who was taken down from a cross and survived. This, he says, ‘lends credence to the “swoon” theory advanced in past years to explain the disappearance of the body from the tomb’ (Cornfeld 1982:177). But, before continuing in this direction, Cornfeld wanted to summarize other theories that have attempted to explain away the resurrection. To do so, he employs an extended series of passages – some eight pages – from Paul L Maier’s book, *The first Easter*. Maier is a conservative scholar who believes in the resurrection.

Cornfeld summarizes Maier’s work, explaining alternative theories that have been employed in the past. These include the stolen body theory, the wrong tomb theory, and a curious one called the ‘lettuce theory’ (this refers to the gardener who did not want people trampling on his lettuce on the way to visit Jesus, and therefore removed the body). Other efforts include psychological and/or hallucination theories. Also, the ‘twin brother’ theory has been used to claim that people actually saw Jesus’ look-alike twin brother after the crucifixion. Maier responds to these and then offers positive evidence for the resurrection, including the changed lives of the original followers (Cornfeld 1982:179-186).

After this interlude, Cornfeld returns to his own narrative. Maier’s arguments helped Cornfeld dismiss many of the standard alternative theories. In spite of this, it is curious that he spends no time pondering the possibility that Maier’s own view (that of an actual resurrection) might have happened. He is left with one option, the one alluded to above: ‘Namely, that the women who came to inspect the tomb, as ordained in the *Halakhah*, found to their consternation not a body, but an empty tomb. The physical survival of the wretched body of Jesus led to the enthusiastic retroactive effect of the “resurrection” (Cornfeld 1982:187).

This version of the ‘swoon theory’ is more streamlined than Schonfield’s in the *Passover plot*. Here, it is quite simple; the tomb was empty because Jesus never really died and somehow left the tomb. The empty tomb, in turn, was ultimately the reason for the disciples’ later belief in his resurrection.

4.4.3 Max Dimont

Max Dimont became famous for writing the bestselling book, *The Jews, God and history*. It is in a smaller, later work that he addresses the resurrection. In *Appointment in Jerusalem*, he sees four basic possibilities to explain what actually happened. The first is that it was an actual historical event. The second, following Reimarus, is that the disciples stole the body and then spread the news of the resurrection. The next view is that Jesus did not die on the cross, and later revealed himself. The final view states that there was no plot or deception, but that the events were written to conform to the new faith (Dimont 1991:115).

At first, Dimont does not take sides, saying that the resurrection is ultimately ‘an enigma embedded in faith’ (Dimont 1991:123). He does, however, have sympathy for the fourth view stated above, and makes an argument that the Gospels themselves provide evidence of this. He begins with Mark. This Gospel ends abruptly. Since the empty tomb is mentioned but without comments, he deduces that this issue ‘held little or no significance’ for Mark (Dimont 1991:118). This raised questions among potential converts who would hear or read the story: ‘The orchestration of doubt began to sweep Christian communities in the decades following Mark’s gospel. Pagans considering conversion to Christianity were puzzled by Mark’s abrupt ending. They wanted more proof of a resurrection’ (Dimont 1991:118).

This chain of events – offered by Dimont without verification – leads to a new generation that did not know whether the resurrection was real. This is where Matthew and Luke come in. Matthew’s main contribution was to address the ‘persistent rumors’ that the disciples stole the body. Specifically, he ‘executed a brilliant checkmate’ by ‘shifting the suspicion from the disciples to the Jews’ (Dimont 1991:119). Luke added that Jesus told the disciples to examine his hands, thus demonstrating that Jesus was alive after having been crucified.

But even after the three synoptic Gospels were written, other questions arose. Specifically, how can it be known for sure whether or not Jesus actually died after being on the cross? Dimont sees this as an appropriate question, since ‘one did not usually die on the cross in only six hours’ (Dimont 1991:120). To account for this, the Gospel of John adds that the Roman soldiers also stabbed Jesus with a spear. The message was now complete and finalized: ‘Jesus became a messiah by popular demand, and the concept of a resurrection was born in faith and handed down by tradition’ (Dimont 1991:123).

Chapter 5

Synthesis

There are two main aspects to the hypothesis of this study. First, Jewish New Testament scholars too often dismiss an adequate examination of the resurrection of Jesus. Second, those who have interacted with the resurrection have not produced an adequate alternative to the historicity of the event. These will be addressed respectively in this final Chapter.

5.1 ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION

The entire field of Jewish New Testament scholarship is still quite small. This is the main reason why there is limited scholarship on the resurrection of Jesus. But, as seen throughout this study, the resurrection of Jesus has also been marginalized as an area of study. Each of the previous Chapters affirmed this in one way or another. In the first Chapter, the Introduction, Galvin and Ben-Chorin stated directly that the resurrection of Jesus was absent from the Jewish study.

Chapter 2 surveyed the literature on the Jewish study of Jesus, and found that the resurrection was simply not a topic of discussion. There are two minor exceptions to this. Melamed wrote an article about Spinoza's view of the resurrection (§ 3.1.1), although it was not compared with other Jewish views. Lapidé listed five quotes from Jewish scholars about the resurrection (§ 4.2.1), but these were not necessarily about the historicity of the event, which is the focus of our present study.

Chapter 3 was the longest. It examined the potential reasons why the resurrection of Jesus has not been explored more thoroughly. These may be summarized in two main categories. First, there are assumptions about whether or not the event happened. These ranged from atheism (miracles are impossible) to agnosticism (the texts make it impossible to know what actually happened). These are general obstacles, which may be employed equally by Jews and Gentiles.

The second category includes more specifically Jewish objections, although non-Jews can, in theory, employ these arguments as well. This category does not specifically deny that Jesus rose from the dead, but focuses on the fact that any implications of such an event would be irrelevant. These include questions about anti-Semitism, the concept(s) of resurrection in Jewish history, and the role of the messiah. The final example in this second category is the question of two-covenant theology. This is a uniquely Jewish response to the resurrection, as it provides an exclusive loophole for

Jews to not believe. Gentiles cannot claim a similar exception, they must either deny the event or produce a theology that includes some type of universalism.

Chapter 4 surveyed the scholarship that either addressed the resurrection, or should have. The first Section (§ 4:1), included the most exhaustive works on the historical Jesus by Jewish scholars. They may loosely be called biographies. Eight of the ten in this category wrote entire books on the life of Jesus. The two remaining scholars (Goodman and Kaufman) dedicated half a book, or a significant section of a book, respectively. It is here that the lack of interest in the resurrection is the most profound. Authors in this category should have addressed the subject head on, or at least acknowledged it. But, this was not necessarily the case.

The only one of the ten to significantly interact with the resurrection was Montefiore. His treatment was not as exhaustive as most of those in § 4:2, but on the topics he did address he was the most thorough. This was because he was following the texts and responded accordingly. The others variously employed the New Testament, as needed, but in general attempted to reconstruct the life of Jesus based on the (usually quite limited) parts of the New Testament that they each felt were relevant.

The remaining nine authors in § 4.1 wrote remarkably little about the resurrection. Goodman and Enelow mentioned it in passing. The former attributed the belief to Mary Magdalene and the latter to Paul. Each of these conclusions was expressed in one sentence. Trattner wrote nothing on the subject, although he did say at the very end that the Jesus of the Gospels is a product of the first century, when paganism was prominent. Flusser ended his story with Jesus on the cross. Fredriksen offered a unique contribution. She wrote an entire book on Jesus (two, actually), strongly affirmed the disciples' belief in the resurrection, yet made no comments about either the visions or the empty tomb.

In between Montefiore's thorough examination and the dismissal of the subject by these other five, there were three scholars who raised the question of the resurrection and offered some type of comment. Klausner addressed both the visions and the empty tomb, each with a speculative dismissal. Kaufman and Ben-Chorin also pondered the possibilities and offered little more than a shrug. The remaining scholar, Rivkin, took a different approach. He acknowledged the belief in the resurrection by both the disciples and Paul. In each case, he noticed, the belief seemed to go against all odds. No alternative was given, nor did he specifically say it did not happen.

Skipping over Section 4:2 for the moment, Section 4:3 dealt with authors who made comments about the resurrection within greater works of Jewish history. These usually

included small sections on Jesus and Christianity. Ironically, in these brief sections the resurrection was more often acknowledged than in the major works about the life of Jesus. All of the seven authors in this category mentioned the disciples' belief and/or Paul's experience. Responses were usually given in one sentence.

Section 4:4 was included in this survey to provide anecdotal evidence of further Jewish opinions. The three authors in this Section addressed the resurrection, although they go beyond the (scholarly) boundaries of this study.

Section 4:2 focuses on the five scholars who specifically wrote about the resurrection. But, this does not necessarily mean that all the scholarship here was complete either. Cohn-Sherbok wrote an article that offered some good introductory remarks, but fell short of a proper examination of the basic evidence. He mentioned Lapidé's book but did not interact with it at all. He also had nothing to say about the empty tomb or Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus.

The remaining four scholars from this Section were the only ones to interact significantly with the resurrection (with Montefiore running close behind). Lapidé and Vermes each wrote a whole book on the subject. Segal also examined the question deeply in a number of books and articles. Cook commented on all of the relevant questions, although, because of the nature of his book, not nearly as exhaustively as these other three.

The following Section will survey the views presented in Chapter 4, with a special emphasis on the works of these four scholars. These four wrote their relevant books or articles within a thirty year period (1979-2009) and have diverse backgrounds. The first two were born in Europe before the Second World War. Lapidé was from Germany, but later lived briefly in Canada, and then for many years in Israel. He identified as an Orthodox Jew. Vermes was born in Hungary to nominal Jewish parents (who eventually died in the Holocaust) and was baptized at a young age. He became a Catholic priest, and wrote the first ever dissertation on the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the late 1950s he left the priesthood and reclaimed his Jewish identity. He then spent several decades as professor of Jewish studies at Oxford. By contrast, Segal and Cook were both born and raised in the United States within liberal (Reform) Judaism.

5.2 ANALYSIS OF THE ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS

The scholars surveyed in this study represent a microcosm of the vast literature. Gary Habermas surveyed the general scholarship on the resurrection from 1975 to 2005. There were over 2,000 scholarly publications on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in these thirty years (Habermas 2005). These include both conservative and non-

conservative entries. In other words, the scholars surveyed included both committed Christians and non-Christians (although there were also some intermediate positions). Right away, this is radically different than the present study in two ways; sheer volume, and the fact that all of the authors in this study, by definition, are not Christian.

Almost all the authors in this study assumed that the resurrection was not a historical event. Lapide was the exception, as far as those who specifically studied the historicity of the event. Greenberg (§ 3.6.1) also affirmed that the resurrection happened, but this seemed to be more for the sake of his ecumenical arguments than the results of an historical investigation.

This Section will survey the alternative suggestions put forth in response to the evidence that points to the resurrection. The information from Chapter 4 will be synthesized and analyzed here, with an occasional reference to comments from elsewhere. Again, the works of Lapide, Vermes, Segal and Cook will be featured. The categories below are the ones most often discussed by the authors. All of the scholars made reference to at least one of these points. Quotes or allusions made in this Chapter will not be cited if they are taken from Chapter 4. The citation may be found in each scholar's respective Section above. Material from these or other scholars not mentioned specifically in Chapter 4 will be cited here in the regular fashion.

5.2.1 Crucifixion

Next to the fact that Jesus existed – and that he was a Jew – the historicity of the crucifixion is virtually beyond discussion. Isaac M. Weiss was the exception that proves the rule. This simple fact is profoundly significant for a number of reasons, but it is also an obstacle.

There are some unique challenges in studying the crucifixion. Hindering the investigation is the blood-stained history of Christian-Jewish relations. The crucifixion is immediately and inextricably tied to the question of guilt for the death of Jesus. From the polemics of the early church, to the medieval passion plays and renaissance art, the Christian narrative has been to blame the Jews for putting Jesus on the cross. Hoffman (§ 2.2.2) and Stahl (§ 2.2.3) documented Jewish artists and writers who explored this theme. The crucifixion was portrayed in light of Jewish suffering, both as the cause and as an ongoing metaphor. For many, this is the only way to even think about the crucifixion. The issue was raised again in 2004 with the production of the Hollywood movie, *The Passion*. Jewish scholars were quick to respond (Greenberg 2004; Segal 2004; Reinhartz 2004; Fredrikson 2006; Garber 2006; Sandmel 2006).

These are extremely important issues that must not be downplayed or avoided. But, they are not the topic of this study. At issue here is what happened immediately after the crucifixion, not how later commentators used the crucifixion for polemical purposes. The crucifixion is intimately connected with the resurrection. It must be the starting point in the discussion. In order for Jesus to be resurrected, he needed to die. The manner of death was not important. In that sense, the crucifixion is not essential. However, acknowledgement of the crucifixion helps establish several key points for the discussion of the historicity of the resurrection.

First, the crucifixion pinpoints the date of the resurrection to within just a few years. Pontius Pilate ruled over Judea between 26 and 36 CE. That Pilate was governor at the time of Jesus' death was either stated or assumed (or at least not denied) by all of the authors above. The crucifixion was given a date ranging from 29 to 33 CE, and many simply used the round number of 30 CE. This dating is important as a frame of reference, in comparison to the events that will be discussed below. There was a flurry of activity within a few decades of the crucifixion that argues against seeing Jesus as merely a common criminal, or even a common prophet or revolutionary. As discussed, 1 Corinthians was written in the fifties, within twenty-five years of the crucifixion. The kerygma of 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (according to Segal, Lapide and Levenson, although not necessarily Fredriksen) is a hymn proclaiming faith in the resurrection that is traced to within just a few years of the crucifixion. Attestation of his miracles was also shown to be remarkably early and unique in scope when compared with other miracle workers in the ancient world (so said Vermes, Avery-Peck and Mach).

Second, the crucifixion establishes that Jesus actually died. The so called 'swoon' theory employed by Schonfield, Cornfeld, and hinted at by Kaufmann, makes for good drama, but it simply does not correspond to reality. Even if someone did survive such an ordeal, they would be in no condition to convince anyone that they had been resurrected. On top of that, being in a tomb – even for one day – would not be a place of healing. Quite the opposite. For this reason, the death of Jesus on the cross was affirmed by almost all of the authors in this survey (apart from those just mentioned, and Wise who denied the crucifixion itself). Any scholarly discussion about the resurrection must begin with the certainty that he died on the cross.

Third, the crucifixion was an agonizing and humiliating defeat. It carried a certain stigma, not the least of which was the sheer brutality of the event. The disciples had to deal not only with the death of their leader, but the heightened emotional impact regarding the way he died (Hengel 1977; Chapman 2008). Many would have thought that Jesus was cursed (Setzer 1991:318-319). Because of this, a number of the authors acknowledged that something out of the ordinary must have happened to produce belief

in the resurrection. Other men had claimed to be the Messiah and failed. Their followers dwindled even before they died. But, Jesus achieved success. As Rivkin said, 'he did so after the very crucifixion which should have refuted his claims decisively' (Rivkin 1978:62). Lapide added the following:

How was it possible that his disciples, who by no means excelled in intelligence, eloquence, or strength of faith, were able to begin their victorious march of conversion only *after* the shattering fiasco on Golgotha – a march which put all their successes before Easter completely into the shadow?

(Lapide 1983:69; emphasis in the original)

5.2.2 The burial: Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph of Arimathea is a unique figure in the Gospels. According to the canonical story he was responsible for asking Pilate for the body of Jesus to bury him in a family tomb. Joseph is mentioned in all four Gospels, and his role is acknowledged by Montefiore, Klausner, Ben-Chorin and Flusser.

Geza Vermes offered slightly more information. Responding to the accusation that someone stole the body, he says that 'the organizer(s) of the burial was/were well known and could have easily been asked for and supplied an explanation', and therefore the notion of a stolen body is an invalid theory. At another point, he specifically referred to Joseph as the one who was 'apparently the owner of the tomb'. Segal offered one comment on Joseph, saying that the burial account was 'so manifestly polemical' that it must be questioned. This is at least partly due to his overriding belief that Paul spoke of a non-physical resurrection and did not mention a tomb (see below). Yet, Segal did acknowledge that the burial tradition is early.

Cook wrote the most about Joseph of Arimathea. He might have been a historical person, Cook concedes, but the scenario is entirely fiction. He cites several reasons. Like Segal, Cook believes that Paul did not know of the empty tomb story so it must be a later invention by Mark. The Joseph scenario serves several purposes. For example, it demonstrates that non-disciples (like Joseph) may act more like true disciples than the ones who are originally called disciples. This, Cook argues, was part of Mark's overall plan to denigrate the Jewish disciples in the eyes of the gentile readers of his Gospel. But, as discussed above, his evidence for this scenario is highly speculative on a number of levels, and cannot be validated. Another reason Cook rejects the Joseph story is because he believes that there probably would not have been a tomb in the case of Jesus. Magness gave an alternative perspective (§ 3.2.3) and concluded that the Joseph story actually does fit with what is known about archaeology and ancient burial traditions, even if it does not specifically validate the historicity of Joseph himself.

Joseph of Arimathea remains an interesting and important figure. Belief in his existence, or his specific role, is not mandatory for belief in the historicity of the resurrection. But, it is often attacked in an attempt to discredit the empty tomb. Indeed, if the burial story is fiction, the account of the empty tomb is that much more suspect. Five of the authors affirmed that Jesus was placed in Joseph's tomb. Two of them (Segal and Cook) specifically questioned it. The former shrugged it off without explanation, while the latter offered a fanciful alternative.

5.2.3 The disciples' belief in the resurrection

All the scholars agreed that the original disciples continued to believe in Jesus after the devastation of the cross. Their belief in the resurrection was almost always listed as the explanation for this phenomenon. There are two scholars who did not specifically mention the resurrection as the cause, but neither did they deny it. For Roth it was Jesus' 'personal magnitude'. For Martin Goodman it was the combination of his 'ethical teachings' and his preaching about the Kingdom of God that caused the disciples to bounce back after the defeat of the cross. All of the remaining authors specifically affirmed that the original disciples believed in the resurrection of Jesus.

Fredriksen pointed to the disciples' commitment to his teaching about the kingdom of God as the catalyst for their belief in the resurrection. Their belief, although not the event itself, is described as 'historical bedrock'. Four of the scholars (Kauffman, Sachar, Grayzel and Ben-Chorin) said that the empty tomb either directly caused the belief in the resurrection, or lead to their visions which in turn was responsible for their belief in the resurrection. Visions that were not caused by the empty tomb were also said to produce resurrection faith. For these, there was sometimes an accompanying psychological diagnosis. Klausner said the disciples were 'enthusiastic to the point of madness' and Cohn-Sherbok said they had a 'subjective psychological experience'.

Other, more general explanations were offered as well. Baron simply said they had visions. Graetz said that the disciples were devastated by the 'stumbling block' of the crucifixion. Because of this, Isaiah 53 was then used to 'make the events fit the prophecy', although this does not explain why they did not simply abandon their devotion to Jesus. Rivkin, on the other hand, simply said that the disciples 'became convinced' of the resurrection.

Lapide pondered the possibility of the hallucination theory. If it happened on a smaller scale, he reasoned, such a thing may have been possible. But, given all the circumstances, he found it much more difficult to embrace. The disciples were scared and in the midst of fleeing. They had denied their master. Their turnaround, he noticed, was remarkably quick. They were 'convinced of their salvation' and achieved more

success than ever before. Therefore, he concluded, 'no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation'. Vermes was more agnostic about the cause of the visions. But, he was none the less certain that it had a dramatic impact on the disciples. He says they had a 'powerful mystical experience' that enabled them to become 'ecstatic spiritual warriors'.

Cook had very little to say about the disciples' belief in the resurrection. It is perhaps the only piece of the resurrection evidence that he does not attempt to explain away with an appeal to his 'gospel dynamics'. It is presented as fact that the original disciples believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Such a belief, he said, went against the theologies of the day, and they were also 'demoralized' by the crucifixion, but for some reason they 'rebounded through faith that he rose from the dead'. He suggests that the original cause for this was based on 'cognitive dissonance'.

Segal offered several explanations, as he addressed the issue in more than one book. He acknowledged that the disciples did believe in the resurrection, as early as 'Easter Sunday'. The antecedents that lead to the kerygma, he proposes, were numerous. These include themes from biblical and extra biblical literature, combined with, perhaps, some of Jesus' teachings, and then finalized with the help of extremely sophisticated hermeneutics. There are two basic problems here, as discussed above. First, this scenario attempts to find theological support for their experiences, but it does not explain the origin, or reality, of their experiences in the first place. Second, it seems highly unlikely – indeed, miraculous – to think that these Galilean fisherman would have had either the opportunity or the sophistication to arrive at such conclusions, especially within a matter of days. Segal also admitted that there must have been a historic event involving Jesus that went beyond the disciples' subjectivity, one that helped cause their belief in the resurrection. No suggestion was given.

Theories of visions or hallucinations for the disciples have been a mainstay of critical New Testament scholarship for the last two hundred years and the nuances are vast (Habermas 2001). For now, just a couple of points need to be made. Virtually all of the authors assume that very little can be known about the disciples and their circumstances. Any psychological assessment is therefore both speculative and tentative. It is at best an alternative theory, but it does not debunk the canonical view. Such a verdict is not only a commentary on what might have happened, it is usually inspired by the modern worldview that says that such things *do not* happen.

But, the narrative still needs to be explained. For most of the authors it was enough to offer a simple (and simplistic) solution. Only Segal explored such questions as – to use legal vocabulary – opportunity and motive. His elaborate explanation attempts to

account for all the variables. Yet, in the end, he did not provide a plausible alternative for the disciples' belief. This is an important aspect of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, the disciples' belief *alone* would not be sufficient evidence. It must be evaluated in conjunction with both the previous event (a devastating crucifixion) and the other evidence to be addressed immediately below.

5.2.4 Paul's encounter

Paul's dramatic experience with the resurrected Jesus also needs to be explained. The scholars took two main approaches to this subject. The first one either downplays or ignores Paul's experience and focuses on him as the creator of Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus then becomes merely a borrowed idea from paganism, which would preclude any further investigation of what actually happened to him.

Graetz and Grayzel, for example, suggested that Paul's employment of paganism was part of an overall scheme to attract Gentiles. Trattner alluded to this when he said that the New Testament's Jesus is a product of the first century, a time subsumed with 'savior-gods, virgin births, incarnations, healing miracles and the atoning effect of sacrificial blood'. For Baron, Paul's Hellenistic background allowed him to incorporate 'pagan mysteries of salvation' into his theology. Cook questioned the canonical narrative of Paul's encounter in Damascus. The testimony of both Acts and Paul's own letters are rejected. Christianity in its Pauline form, he concluded, is therefore based on pagan concepts.

The second general approach acknowledges that Paul did have some experience that needs to be explained. This begs the question of what really happened, and an appeal to psychology was often the case. Klausner and Maccoby each offered highly speculative scenarios to explain Paul's state of mind and transformation. For the former it included 'an involved psychological process'. For Maccoby, Paul's transformation is 'psychologically and socially understandable' when seen through the lens of his (Maccoby's) own reconstruction of Paul's life.

Sachar said Paul had a 'tremendous psychological experience' and Ben-Chorin said the event was rooted in his 'subjectivity'. Graetz and Kohler both said that Paul was 'prone to visions', although this would not explain why he would have a vision of Jesus, since he was persecuting the disciples. Roth and Martin Goodman specifically affirmed the Damascus Road experience. For Roth, Paul 'suddenly became convinced of the Messianic claims' of Jesus, and Goodman simply said that Paul had a 'vision of the risen Jesus'. Lapedes was sure the kerygma began from a primitive date, but otherwise did not include Paul in his quest for the resurrection. Vermes, likewise, made a single reference to Paul in Damascus. This would add weight to the claim that he was not just

another follower of Jesus, but specifically a former skeptic. It is interesting to note that the two most exhaustive, and positive, studies of the resurrection were done without the evidence from Paul's life.

Segal offered a variety of possibilities to explain what happened to Paul and how Paul interpreted it. These run the gamut from a personality prone to visions and ecstatic experiences, to numerous influences from the vast array of Second Temple literature, to modern psychological and physiological explanations for religious experiences. If nothing else, Segal's expansive scholarship shows how difficult it is to explain away Paul's experience in simple terms. For Segal, Paul undeniably had an experience (or several) that caused, or at least contributed to, his belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

The importance of Paul's experience is twofold. First, it happened early, probably no more than five years after the crucifixion. Second, he was not only a skeptic but a persecutor of those who promoted the resurrection message. The reasons for his belief would need to be different from the disciples, since they came from very different starting points. This includes not only their original view of Jesus, but their educational and cultural background as well. In other words, it cannot simply be stated that the same thing happened to the disciples and Paul. Yet, they arrived at the same conclusions (referring to the general belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. The debate over a physical or non-physical resurrection will be discussed immediately below).

5.2.5 Paul's theology of the resurrection

Paul's belief in the resurrection of Jesus was foundational to his theology. In the book of Romans alone the event is mentioned no fewer than eight times (Rm 1:4; 4:24; 6:4, 5, 9; 8:11, 34; 10:9). But, what did he actually believe about the resurrection? Was it a purely physical event? Or, as a number of scholars have suggested, was he referring to a non-physical resurrection? This is an important matter, and three scholars proclaimed that Paul spoke of a non-physical event based on his words in 1 Corinthians 15. Two of them, Cook and Fredriksen, assumed this without further discussion.

Segal dedicated a forty-page chapter in his book on the afterlife to this question. He attempted to show that Paul believed in a non-physical resurrection. Later in the same book, however, he explains that Paul's view was unlike other views of the day regarding non-physical resurrections. His argument (see §3.3.4) employed multiple layers of possibilities, most of which he admitted were speculative and far from conclusive. His conclusion ultimately hinges on 1 Corinthians 15:50, which says that 'flesh and blood' will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, Segal did not exegete the passage in its immediate context (which is rich in metaphors), nor did he discuss how the phrase

'flesh and blood' is used elsewhere in the New Testament (Mt 16:17), nor how other scholars dealt with this. This is ironic, given the detailed scholarship he used to address his lesser points. He simply took the phrase at its presumed face value.

Two other scholars, Setzer and Levenson, exegeted this passage and came to the exact opposite conclusion. Setzer said the phrase referred to a different kind of bodily life, but that it was 'not a rejection of bodily resurrection'. Levenson (and co-author Madigan) acknowledged that the body Paul spoke of was raised a 'spiritual' body' (1 Cor 15:44), but it was nonetheless a body. They concluded that Paul was not referring to 'immortality or transmigration of the soul or anything else of that sort' (§ 3.4.3).

This, perhaps, remains a debated issue. But, for the scholars surveyed in this study, it is important to see that the only two who interacted with 1 Corinthians 15:50 concluded that Paul spoke of a physical body. The opposite belief, however, will be an important assumption for both Segal and Cook in their overall assessment of the resurrection, specifically their view of the empty tomb.

5.2.6 Empty tomb

This category revealed some interesting options, but most of the scholars agreed that there was an empty tomb. For some (Kaufman, Schonfield and Cornfeld) it was because Jesus did not die on the cross and he somehow left the tomb on his own accord. Grayzel, Sachar and Ben-Chorin acknowledged an empty tomb, but without an explanation. Montefiore, uniquely, said that Jesus remained in the tomb undisturbed. But, since he affirmed the historicity of both Joseph of Arimathea and the women who went to the tomb, obvious questions arise about why the tomb was not checked for verification.

The views of our main four scholars were split in two. Lapede and Vermes each acknowledged the empty tomb. Lapede noticed that it appears in all four Gospels, and that a fictitious account would not have featured women so prominently as the ones to find the tomb empty. Vermes made similar observations. Not only does the role of the women argue for authenticity, but the slight variations in the story also lead in that direction.

Segal and Cook deny the empty tomb based (at least partly) on their belief that Paul spoke of a non-physical resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:37-50. It is ironic that they both hold this position, since Segal arrived at this through a thorough examination of Paul within a Jewish context. Cook did not explain why he believes this, but his overall view about Paul's theology is based on pagan influences, the exact opposite of Segal.

Segal and Cook also use the lack of specific mention of the empty tomb in the kerygma (1 Cor 15:3-7) as evidence that the empty tomb story was not known by Paul and developed later. This argument only has weight if it is first demonstrated that Paul was actually speaking of a non-physical resurrection. But, as a number of scholars have noted (see the discussion in Licona 2010:333-338), there are several good responses to this accusation on top of the fact that it is an argument from silence. These include, but are not limited to the following:

1. The absence of the mention of an empty tomb simply means it was not part of the kerygma;
2. The kerygma was meant to provide a list of events, not a narrative or a description;
3. The words 'buried then raised' assume a physical burial and therefore the resurrection should be assumed to be physical as well.

If the empty tomb account is a later invention, it needs to be explained why and how it made its appearance in the Gospel of Mark. Segal at one point retreated from his stance on Paul's view, and pondered the possibility that there may have been an empty tomb story of which Paul was unaware. He rejected the Joseph of Arimathea account, but acknowledged that the attestation of the burial was both early and multiple. He saw the report of the women as 'solid' but the empty tomb story as 'less solid', a dichotomy he did not explain. In fact, apart from this one sentence, he did not attempt to explain the embarrassment factor of the women as witnesses.

Returning to his belief that the empty tomb story was a later invention, Segal proposed several possibilities. These include that the tomb story was a corrective to the 'problem' of having no eyewitnesses, that it gives the impression of being verifiable, and that it guards against a misunderstanding of the type of resurrection Paul 'really' spoke about. These were addressed above. In short, these arguments may help *promote* a physical resurrection, but they do not explain why the very message of a non-physical resurrection would have been transformed into a physical one in the first place. This would entail not just a change in details, but a fundamental change in the gospel message.

Cook also gives several arguments against the empty tomb story. First, he addresses the question of how such a notion might have begun. If someone had a vision of Jesus, they might have assumed that wherever he was laid must now be empty. But, as discussed above, both Jewish and pagan notions of the afterlife at the time would have assumed the exact opposite. The pagan view excluded the physical body in the afterlife, and the Jewish view of resurrection would have included *all* the dead.

As for the account of the women in the narrative, Cook says that they were the only ones left for Mark to employ since the men had fled. This is perhaps his weakest argument, considering his view that Mark flagrantly created characters and events according to his literary need.

One other scholar deserves a mention here. Elias Bickerman was not mentioned above, but he was a distinguished Jewish scholar of the early and middle twentieth century. A recent reprint of his writings includes an article called 'The empty tomb'. He offers a unique approach to the subject. His main argument is the distinction between the concepts of rapture and resurrection in ancient literature. The former refers to a disappearance of a body (like Enoch), while the latter refers to a translation to heaven that may be accompanied by visions of the one who was resurrected. The combination of the two in the gospels is therefore incongruent: 'The empty tomb is proof of rapture; but a resurrection is never characterized or demonstrated by the disappearance of the corpse, but only by the apparition of the one who has been restored to life' (Bickerman 2007:717).

Bickerman interacts with a wide body of literature to make his case. Unfortunately, he does not distinguish between Jewish and pagan texts and lumps them all together as examples of ancient literature. There is no understanding of the unique perspective of Second Temple Judaism. Discussing Mark, he says that it is 'perfectly appropriate to situate his narrative in the literary tradition which begins roughly with the story of Aristeus in the sixth century BCE and continues for twelve centuries, until the novel about Simeon' (Bickerman 2007:717). The resurrection of Jesus not only disagrees with this vast literature it goes against Jewish theology. He writes: 'But the figure of a messiah raised from the dead was wholly foreign to Judaism' (Bickerman 2007:722; see § 3:5:2 above). This, again, raises the question of why at least some Jews believed it.

For Bickerman, the resurrection does not meet literary or theological criteria. He did not interact with what did, or what might have, actually happened. Following Bultmann, his working assumption was that Mark reported earlier traditions, while adapting the 'framework of the Hellenistic theology' (Bickerman 2007:721). It is the apparitions that are suspect and assumed to be later embellishments. The story of the tomb, however, points to a 'probably older stage of faith in Christ' (Bickerman 2007:721).

The empty tomb remains an important piece of the resurrection puzzle. Along with the visions of the disciples that went against all known expectations, and the experience of Paul that was a complete turnaround for him, the empty tomb provides both a solid and corroborating additional piece of attestation. Lapide, Vermes and six other scholars mentioned above affirmed the existence of the empty tomb. Attempts to discredit it have

not yet succeeded. As Setzer has demonstrated, it is an 'early and firmly entrenched piece of the tradition'.

5.2.7 Growth of the new movement

There was not much written on the origins of the earliest church. Perhaps this is based on popular views of Acts as a less than adequate source for the actual history. But, as demonstrated above, the general narrative of Acts is accepted, and this should include – at least to some extent – the witness of the earliest disciples in the face of persecution. To categorically dismiss all of this would be overly skeptical. The earliest followers were bold in the face of opposition.

The disciples were far from the only people in history that were committed to their cause to the point of martyrdom. However, their transformation from defeat (because of the crucifixion) to victory was extraordinary. The persecution was an additional challenge, one that *would* make their experience unique. The disciples who faced persecution were standing up for what they had personally experienced, not what they had heard or read from others. If their belief was based on mere hallucinations, the persecution would have been a sobering wake-up call. But, there is no evidence of defectors or renouncers.

The movement continued to grow. Stemming from a tiny band of Galilean 'fisherman' and one (vision prone?) rabbinical student from Tarsus, the movement would eventually captivate a significant percentage of the globe. Martin Goodman observed that it is a 'remarkable fact' that a first century Jewish movement came, by the fourth century, to 'govern the world-view of those who held power in Rome'. Surely, the roots of this phenomenon must be studied.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The two aspects of this study have, I believe, been proven. First, Jewish scholars have too often prematurely dismissed an investigation of the resurrection of Jesus. Second, those who have written on the subject have not succeeded in explaining it away. This does not mean that we have proved that the resurrection is a historical event. That was not our goal.

The practical use for this data may be to stimulate discussion. By this, I do not mean interfaith debate or public discourse. Debates about the resurrection are ubiquitous on the internet and in books. They are usually between a conservative Christian and an atheist (Copan & Tacelli 2000; Baggett 2009), or sometimes between a Christian and a Muslim (Licona & Ally 2013). Whether or not Jesus rose from the dead is a vital point for all concerned. If it did not happen, the Christian will lose the entire foundation of his or

her faith. Conversely, if it did, the atheist position is likewise obliterated. The faith of the Muslim, as well, would be severely shaken based on the Koran's direct statements against the resurrection. The Jewish scholar, however, has no immediate interest in the subject, nor apparent reason to enter the discussion as it is here promoted.

I am aware of only one example of a debate between a Jewish scholar and Christian scholar, where the resurrection was a key part. Even here, ironically, the topic was not actually addressed. Peter Zass, who wrote the commentary for Colossians in the *JANT*, participated in a friendly debate/discussion with Christian apologist, William Lane Craig. Craig explained why he believed in the historicity of the resurrection and asked for a response. Zass offered the following somewhat surprising statement: 'I don't dispute the fact of the resurrection. It's not something I'm involved in, but it doesn't seem to be an event that's made much positive difference to Jewish history' (Copan & Evans 2001:38).

Zass seemingly acknowledges the reality of the resurrection, and it would be interesting to know how and why he came to this conclusion. His dismissal of the discussion however, is curious. He is not 'involved' in the resurrection because it has no interest for him. Yet, he is a New Testament scholar, and specifically he was in a debate where the resurrection was sure to be an issue. The perceived relevance, or level of personal interest, in the event should not be an issue in the discussion of whether or not it happened (especially since, in his case, he apparently believes it did happen). The public debate format for the resurrection may have value. But, it is not being advocated here. It is probably not a good idea for Jewish scholars to enter the debate in this type of arena. What *is* being advocated here, simply, is that those who are studying the historical Jesus need to include the resurrection as part of their discussion. Jewish New Testament scholarship has come a long way since Montefiore a century ago. But, until the resurrection is included in the discussion, it remains incomplete.

The above authors provided various approaches and conclusions. There are a few events, surrounding the resurrection, that are largely agreed upon as historical, or have been shown to be difficult to explain away. The most important of these form the building blocks of the Jewish quest – or, any other quest – for the resurrection of Jesus. The same basic results are found in the wider field of New Testament scholarship (Habermas 2005). They include the following:

1. Jesus was crucified around 30CE;
2. the disciples believed that Jesus rose from the dead;
3. the tomb where Jesus was placed was found empty; and
4. within a few years of the crucifixion, Paul had an experience that he interpreted as encountering the risen Jesus.

An adequate study needs to either refute these events or provide an alternative to the resurrection that navigates around them as a whole. Of course, the wider, non-Jewish field is much more vast (Wright 2003; Licona 2010), and various nuances have been suggested and argued. But, in the end, these general points form the heart of the discussion.

This study has attempted to add to the literature of the Jewish study of Jesus in general. The wave of Jewish New Testament scholars has been steadily increasing in recent years. The publication of the *JANT* and other works are paving the way for a new generation of Jewish scholars who will have even more freedom to explore these previously distant subjects. It is hoped that the resurrection of Jesus will factor more prominently in later studies. This present work is offered as both a summary of where the discussion has been in the past, and hopefully, a guide to future scholarship. It may be compared to a grand jury in the United States legal system. It is not meant to produce the ultimate verdict, but rather to argue that there is a case, one that can and should be made.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, *Jewish scholarship on the resurrection of Jesus*, is meant to contribute to the wider body of literature on the Jewish study of Jesus. The resurrection is deemed the most important event in the New Testament (1 Cor 15:17), yet it is often neglected among Jewish New Testament scholars. There are two main goals to this dissertation. The first is to determine the potential reasons for this aversion, particularly among scholars who are studying the historical Jesus. The second is to examine the findings of the Jewish scholars who *have* interacted with the resurrection. There are five main chapters.

Chapter 1 presents the background issues for this study. These include the evolving nature of the Jewish study of Jesus, the relationship between historiography and the supernatural, the factors that have contributed to the Jewish-Christian schism, and the historic Jewish views of the resurrection of Jesus. This dissertation focuses on scholarship from 1900 to the present. Chapter 2 surveys the books and articles that have documented the Jewish study of Jesus as a whole. This too serves as a prelude to the present discussion, and it also helps expose the deficiency of scholarship on the resurrection.

Chapter 3 is the longest, and it considers the potential reasons why Jewish scholars may assume that the resurrection is either not historical, or that it is of no consequence for Jewish people. This chapter is subdivided into six topics of discussion. These include miracles, the New Testament texts, anti-Semitism, resurrection in general, the messiah, and the means of atonement. For each, it will be demonstrated that alternative viewpoints exist within mainstream Judaism, and also that these presuppositions, in themselves, do not present a barrier to the study of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.

Chapter 4 addresses the writings of Jewish scholars who have made at least some comment on the resurrection. The first section examines the books that have attempted to offer a biography of the life of Jesus. The next section includes the authors who have specifically addressed the resurrection. The remaining two sections of this chapter survey the comments about the resurrection of Jesus that appear in works of Jewish history, and in a few works that fall just outside the parameters of this study.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the conclusions from the previous chapter. The overall level of interaction with the resurrection was, indeed, quite limited. For example, only one of the eleven biographies included more than a passing comment or a quick dismissal of the event. The scholars who addressed the subject more directly approached it from a

variety of angles. But, the alternative suggestions ranged from incomplete to untenable. None of them successfully provided a plausible alternative to the canonical narrative. The Jewish study of Jesus has come a long way in the last century. But, until this all-important topic is adequately confronted, the scholarship remains incomplete. The ultimate purpose of this dissertation is not to prove the historicity of the resurrection, but rather to promote further study.

Keywords

Jesus, resurrection, Jewish-Christian relations, apologetics, historical Jesus, Jewish views of Jesus, intercultural studies, Modern Jewish thought, Gospels, Higher Criticism