

THE ROMAN ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY

By Joseph Atwill

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Email info@joeatwill.com

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1. THE FIRST CHRISTIANS AND THE FLAVIANS

There were many gods who are now seen as fictitious that were worshipped during the era when Jesus purportedly performed his miracles. But while Jesus' feats were no less supernatural than those of Hercules, the possibility that he was also mythological has seldom been considered. One reason for this is that a first century historian, Flavius Josephus, recorded Jesus' existence.

As he relates it, Josephus' life was nearly as fabulous as his famous subject's. He claimed to have been born in Jerusalem in 37 CE into the royal family of Judea, the Macabbees. Like Jesus, Josephus was a child prodigy who astounded his elders with his knowledge of Judaic law. Josephus also claimed to have been a member of each of the Jewish sects of his era, the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Essenes.

When the Jewish rebellion against Rome broke out in 66CE, though with no described military background and believing the cause hopeless, Josephus was given command of the revolutionary army of Galilee. Taken captive, he was brought before the Roman general Vespasian to whom he presented himself as a prophet. He then claimed that Judaism's Messianic prophecies foresaw not a Jewish Messiah, but Vespasian, whom Josephus predicted would become the 'Lord of all mankind.'

After this came to pass, so to speak, and Vespasian became the Emperor of Rome, he rewarded Josephus' clairvoyance by adopting him. The Jewish rebel, Josephus ben Mattathias, thus became Flavius Josephus, the son of Caesar. At this point God spoke to Josephus and informed him that he had switched his favor from the Jews to the Romans. Josephus therefore became an ardent supporter of Rome's conquest of Judea. When Vespasian returned to Rome to receive the mantle of Emperor he left Josephus behind to assist his son Titus with the siege of Jerusalem.

Once the city was destroyed, Josephus took up residence within the Flavian court at Rome where he enjoyed the patronage of Vespasian and the subsequent Flavian emperors, Titus and Domitian. It was while living there that Josephus wrote his two major works, War of the Jews, a description of the 66 –73 CE war between the Romans and the Jews, and Jewish Antiquities, a history of the Jewish people.

Josephus' histories are of great significance to Christianity. Virtually all that we know regarding the social context of the New Testament (NT) is derived from them. Without these works the very dating of the events of the NT would be impossible.

Within his works, Josephus provided Jesus with the historical documentation that Hercules did not receive, a fact that is widely known. However, Josephus also provided Jesus with another kind of documentation that that has been largely forgotten. Early Christians believed that the events Josephus described in War of the Jews proved that Jesus had been able to see into the future.

It is difficult to find even one early Christian who taught another position. Church scholars such as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Cyprian were unanimous in proclaiming that Josephus' description of Titus Flavius' conquest of Judea in War of the Jews proved that Jesus' prophecies had come to pass. As Eusebius wrote in 325CE:

*'If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian (Josephus) concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvelously Strange.'*¹

One example of the 'foreknowledge' that so impressed Eusebius was Jesus' prediction that the 'foes' of Jerusalem would encircle it with a wall, demolish the city and its temple, and 'level' its inhabitants.

And when He was now getting near Jerusalem...

He came into full view of the city, He wept aloud over it, and exclaimed,

For the time is coming upon thee when thy foes will throw up around thee earthworks and a wall, investing thee and hemming thee in on every side.

and level you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.'
[Luke 19:37-43]

All of the precise details Jesus foresaw for Jerusalem did indeed come to pass. Josephus recorded in War of the Jews that Titus ordered that the city be hemmed in 'on every side' Notice that Titus, like Jesus, saw the encircling of the city as an event sanctioned by God, who inspired the Roman soldiers with a 'divine fury' so they might accomplish this 'great thing.'

That therefore his (Titus's) opinion was, that...they must build a wall round about the whole city....,if any one should think such a work to be too great...he ought to consider that it is not fit for Romans to undertake any small work, and that none but God himself could with ease accomplish any great thing.... indeed there now came upon the soldiers a certain divine fury...Titus began the wall from the camp of the Assyrians, where his own camp was pitched, and drew it down to the lower parts of Cenopolis; thence it went along the valley of Cedron, to the Mount of Olives; it then bent towards the south, and encompassed the mountain as far as the rock called Peristereon, and that

¹ (Book III, Ch. VII)

*other hill which lies next it, and is over the valley which reaches to Siloam; whence it bended again to the west, and went down to the valley of the Fountain, beyond which it went up again at the monument of Ananus the high priest, and encompassing that mountain where Pompey had formerly pitched his camp, it returned back to the north side of the city, after which it encompassed Herod's monument, and there, on the east, was joined to Titus's own camp, where it began.*²

Josephus also recorded that Titus did not merely burn Jerusalem and defile its Temple, but ordered that they should be left exactly as Jesus has foreseen, with ‘not one stone upon another.’

*(Titus) gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple...*³

Jesus stated that this calamity would befall Jerusalem’s inhabitants because they did not know the ‘*time of your visitation.*’ The coming ‘visitation’ that Jesus was referring to was to be made by someone he called the ‘Son of Man,’ a title used by the prophet Daniel for the Jewish Messiah.⁴ While it has been universally believed that Jesus was referring to himself when he used the expression the ‘Son of Man,’ he always speaks of this individual in the third person and never as himself. Jesus repeatedly warned the Jews that during the ‘Son of Man’s’ visitation various disasters, like those he foresaw above, would occur.

Be on the alert therefore, for you do not know the day on which your Lord is coming.

Therefore you also must be ready; for it is at a time when you do not expect Him that the Son of Man will come. {Mat 24:42-4}

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. {Matt 25: 13}

Though Jesus did not say exactly when the visitation from the ‘Son of Man’ would occur he did state that he would come before the generation alive during his ministry passed away.

So you also, when you see all these signs, may be sure that He is near--at your very door.

I tell you in solemn truth that the present generation will certainly not pass away without all these things having first taken place. {Mat 24:33-34}

² Josephus War of the Jews, V, xii

³ Josephus War of the Jews VII, 1

⁴ Daniel 7:13

As Jews of this era saw a generation as lasting forty years Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE fit perfectly into the timeframe Jesus gave for his prophecy. However, while Jesus did accurately predict events from the coming war there was a flaw in his 'foreknowledge.' That is, that the person whose 'visitation' actually brought about the destruction of Jerusalem was not Jesus, but Titus Flavius. If his prophecies did envision, (as Eusebius and other Church scholars have maintained), events from the coming war between the Romans and the Jews, then the 'Son of Man' Jesus warned of seems to have been not himself but Titus, a point that we shall return to.

There was little written between the fifth and fifteenth centuries commenting on the numerous parallels between the events Josephus recorded in War of the Jews and Jesus' predictions. This is not surprising, as the Church is known to have actively discouraged scriptural analysis during this era. What evidence was left, however, suggests that during the entire Middle-Ages Christians viewed Josephus' depiction of the war between the Romans and the Jews as proof of Christ's divinity. Icons, carving on caskets and religious paintings from this era all portrayed the 70CE destruction of Jerusalem as the fulfillment of Jesus' doomsday prophecies.

The importance of Josephus' works to Christians during this period can also be gauged by the fact that the Eastern Christian churches of Syria and Armenia actually included his books as part of their handwritten Bible. This pairing also occurred in Europe where, following the invention of the printing press, Latin editions of the Bible included Antiquities and War of the Jews.

Following the Reformation, scholars were able to record their opinions and their writings show that they continued to view the relationship between the NT and War of the Jews as proof of Christ's divinity. For example, Dr. Thomas Newton, wrote in his 1754 work, Dissertations on the Prophecies (On the Significance of A.D.70):

As a general in the wars (Josephus) must have had an exact knowledge of all transactions, and a Jewish priest he would not relate them with any favour of partiality to the Christian cause. His history was approved by Vespasian and Titus (who ordered it to be published) and by King Agrippa and many others, both Jews and Romans, who were present in those wars. He designed nothing less, and yet as if he had designed nothing more, his history of the Jewish wars may serve as a larger comment on our Saviour's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem

Newton's position was the same as Eusebius. Both scholars believed that Josephus 'designed nothing less' than to honestly record the war between the Romans and the Jews. The fact that the events Josephus recorded seemed to be the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy did not strike them as in any way suspicious. On the contrary, they saw the relationship between the two works as proof of Jesus' divinity. They were in no way unusual in this understanding, which was held by the majority of Christian scholars until the end of the 19th century. It was a circular system.

The belief that Josephus' depiction of the destruction of Jerusalem proved that Jesus had seen into the future was largely forgotten during the twentieth century. Only one denomination of Christians, the Preterists, still cites the parallels between War of the Jews and the NT as a proof of Jesus' divinity. Currently most Christians either believe that the apocalypse Jesus envisioned has not yet occurred or ignore these prophecies altogether. As Christianity's third millennium begins few of its members are even aware of the parallels between Jesus' prophecies and the events recorded within War of the Jews that were once of such importance to the religion.

However, we believe that Eusebius was correct in stating that when comparing War of the Jews to the NT, one must admit to observing a relationship that, if not 'divine,' is at the least, 'strange.' As we shall show, the parallels between Jesus' prophecies and Josephus' depiction of Titus' campaign do indeed seem too precise to have been the result of chance. If one accepts the traditional understanding, that the NT and War of the Jews were written at different times by different authors, then the only explanation for the parallels would seem to be the one given by Eusebius, that they were caused by something 'truly divine.' Of course, before accepting any phenomenon as miraculous one should first determine if there exists a plausible non-supernatural explanation for it. The purpose of this work is to present such an explanation for the seemingly miraculous relationships between the NT and War of the Jews.

All scholars have faced the same difficulty in trying to understand first century Judea, a lack of source material. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the major literature describing first-hand the events of first century Judea were the NT and the works of Josephus. For two millennia only these two works illuminated an era so seminal to Western Civilization.

This absence is unusual. In Greece, thousands of pieces of writing from the same era have been discovered. Jesus constantly complained about scribes who, one must assume, were writing something.

Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer much cruelty from the Elders and the High Priests and the Scribes [Matthew 16:21.30]

Rome's occupation of Judea spanned the entire first century. Josephus recorded that during this period, a movement of Jewish Zealots that he called the Sicarii continually staged insurrections against the Empire and its surrogate, the family of Herod. The Sicarii, like the Christians, were Messianic and looked forward to the arrival of the 'Son of God' who would lead them against Rome. Josephus dates the origin of this Messianic movement to the census of Quirinus, curiously also given by the gospels as the date of the birth of Christ. This movement existed for over a hundred years but until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, no written words possibly describing its theology or struggle had ever been found.

We believe that the literature of the Sicarii movement is missing because the Romans destroyed it. A number of the Dead Sea Scrolls (found hidden in caves) describe

an uncompromising sect that awaited a Messiah who would be a military leader. Messianic literature of this sort was surely a catalyst for the Sicarii's rebellion and would have been targeted for destruction by the Romans, who are known to have destroyed Judaic literature. The Talmud, for example, records the Roman practice of wrapping Jewish schoolchildren in their religious scrolls and lighting them afire. Josephus noted that following their war with the Jews, the Romans took the Torah scrolls and other religious literature, and locked them up inside the Flavian palace in Rome.

The only works to have survived this century of religious warfare, the gospels and the histories of Josephus, had pro-Roman perspectives. In the case of Josephus' histories this is hardly surprising as he was an adopted member of the imperial family. It is notable, however, that the NT also had a point of view positive to the Romans. The first century not being a time when one would expect a Judaic cult with a favorable viewpoint toward the Empire to have emerged. Yet the NT text never portray Roman soldiers in a negative light, and actually describe them as 'devout' and God fearing.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

A devout man, and one that feared God with all his heart, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. [Acts 10:1 – 2]

Tax collectors, who would have been working for the Romans, were also presented in the NT in a favorable light. The Apostle Matthew, for example, is actually described as a 'publican' or tax collector.

The citizenship that the works of Josephus and the NT each teach would also have been seen favorably by Rome. Each work proclaims the holiness of subservience. And each takes the position that, as it was God who had given the Romans their power and it was therefore against God's will to resist them. For example, the Apostle Paul taught that Roman judges and magistrates were a threat only to 'evil doers.'

Therefore the man who rebels against his ruler is resisting God's will; and those who thus resist will bring punishment upon themselves.

For judges and magistrates are to be feared not by right-doers but by wrong-doers. You desire--do you not? --to have no reason to fear your ruler. Well, do the thing that is right, and then he will commend you.

For he is God's servant for your benefit. But if you do what is wrong, be afraid. He does not wear the sword to no purpose: he is God's servant--an administrator to inflict punishment upon evil-doers.

We must obey therefore, not only in order to escape punishment, but also for conscience' sake.

Why, this is really the reason you pay taxes; for tax-gatherers are ministers of God, devoting their energies to this very work. [Rom 13:2 - 6]

Josephus shared Paul's belief that the Romans were 'God's servant' who only 'inflict punishment upon evil-doers.'

*Indeed what can it be that hath stirred up an army of the Romans against our nation? Is it not the impiety of the inhabitants? Whence did our servitude commence? Was it not derived from the seditions that were among our forefathers, when the madness of Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, and our mutual quarrels, brought Pompey upon this city, and when God reduced those under subjection to the Romans who were unworthy of the liberty they had enjoyed?*⁵

Thus, the only works that described first century Judea shared a positive viewpoint toward Rome. Why had only they survived?

We believe that the NT and the works of Josephus survived because they were both created and promulgated by Rome. This work shall present evidence indicating that the gospels were created by Titus Flavius, the second of the three Flavian emperors. Titus created the religion for two reasons, the most obvious being to act as a theological barrier against the spread of the militant Messianic Judaism of Judea to other provinces.

Josephus mentioned this threat in War of the Jews. He wrote:

*...,the Jews hoped that all of their nation, which were beyond Euphrates, would have raised an insurrection with them.*⁶

Titus also had another more personal reason for creating the gospels . This being the Jewish Zealots' refusal to worship him as a god. Though he was able to crush their rebellion Titus could not force the Zealots, even through torture or death, to call him 'Lord.'

Josephus noted the staunchness with which the Zealots adhered to their monotheistic faith. He wrote:

*But of the fourth Sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men....say that God is to be their only ruler and Lord. They do not value dying and any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the dying of their relations and friends, not can any fear make them call any man Lord.*⁷

I

Incredible as it may seem, we shall show that Titus designed the gospels with a hidden message within it to reveal that the 'Jesus' who interacted with the disciples following the crucifixion was not a Jewish Messiah but himself. Unable to torture the Jews into foregoing their religion and worshiping him, Titus created a version of Judaism that

⁵ War 5,375

⁶ War Preface 2,5

⁷ Antiquities, 18,23

worshipped him without its followers knowing it. When his clever literary device was eventually recognized Titus would be able to show posterity that he had not failed in his efforts to make the Jews call him 'Lord.' Though always seen as a religious document, the gospels and Christianity are actually a monument to the vanity of a Caesar. One that has finally been discovered.

Titus backdated Jesus' ministry to 30CE thereby 'enabling' him to 'foresee' events in the future. In other words, Jesus was able to accurately prophesize events from the coming war with the Romans because they had already occurred. Titus also created the histories of Josephus so as to document that Jesus had lived and that his prophecies in the NT had come to pass.

While the above claims will, and should, trigger skepticism, it needs to be remembered that as Christianity describes its origin it was not only supernatural but also historically illogical. Christianity, a movement that encouraged pacifism and obedience to Roman rulers, claims to have emerged from a nation engaged in a century long struggle with Rome. An analogy to Christianity's purported origin might be a cult established by Polish Jews during World War II that set up its headquarters in Berlin and encouraged its members to pay taxes to the Third Reich.

When one looks at the form of early Christianity one sees Rome, not Judea. The church's structures of authority, its sacraments, its college of bishops, the title of the head of the religion – the Supreme Pontiff, were all based upon Roman, not Judaic, traditions. Somehow Judea had left little trace upon the form of a religion that purportedly originated inside of it.

Early Christianity was also Roman in its worldview. That is, like the Roman Empire, the movement saw itself as ordained by God to spread throughout the world. Before Christianity no religion is known to have seen itself quite so destined to 'conquer,' to become the religion of all mankind. The type of Judaism described in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, was very selective as to who would be allowed to join its community, as the following passage from the Damascus Document shows.

*No madman, or lunatic, or simpleton, or fool, or blind man, or maimed, or lame, or deaf man, and no minor shall enter into the community for the Angels of Holiness are with them...*⁸

This exclusionary approach was a mirror opposite to that of Christianity's.

*And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them*⁹

⁸ 4QD 17 6-9

⁹ Mat 15:30.13

To try to understand how Christianity established itself within the Roman Empire is to sift through mysteries piled atop the unknown. For example, how did a religion that began as verbal traditions spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic, change into one whose surviving scripture is written almost entirely in Greek? Albert Schweitzer wrote as follows:

'The great and still undischarged task which confronts those engaged in the historical study of primitive Christianity is to explain how the teaching of Jesus developed into the early Greek Theology.'

The most historically illogical aspect of Christianity's origin, however, was its Messiah. Jesus had a political perspective precisely opposite to the 'Son of David' who was awaited by the Jews of this era. Josephus recorded that what most inspired the Jewish rebels was their belief in the Judaic prophecies that foresaw a 'world ruler,' or Messiah, emerging from Judea. The same prophecies that the NT claims predicted a pacifist.

But now, what did the most elevate them in undertaking this war, was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, 'about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth.' The Jews took this prediction to belong to themselves in particular....¹⁰

The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed that Jews of this era indeed 'took this prediction to belong to themselves' and awaited a Messiah who would be the 'Son of God.'

Son of God he will be called and Son of the Most High they will name him... His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom... he will judge the earth in truth... The Great God... will give people into his hand and all of them will cast down before him. His sovereignty is everlasting sovereignty.¹¹

In the following passage from the Damascus Document, notice that the Messiah envisioned by the author was, like Jesus, a shepherd, though not one who would bring peace.

*But all who reject the commandments
and precepts shall bring the reward of the wicked on themselves when God visits the
earth,
when the word written by the hand of the prophet Zechariah shall come (true):
--'Sword,*

*awake upon my Shepherd
and upon the man associated with me, says God.
Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered;
but I will turn my hand upon the little ones' (Zech 13:7).*

¹⁰ War 6, 310 Whiston

¹¹ 4Q547

*Now those who hear him are the flock's afflicted,
these will escape in the period of (God's) visitation. But those who remain will be
offered up to the sword, when the Messiah
of Aaron and Israel comes, as it was in the period of the first visitation,
as he reported by the hand of Ezekiel:
A mark shall be put on the forehead of those who sigh and groan' (Ezek 9:4).
But those who remained were given up to the sword of vengeance, the avenger of
the Covenant..¹²*

The following passage from the Targum also describes a warrior Messiah. Clearly, this would have been the nature of the 'king Messiah' of the Jews who would have, in Josephus' words, '*most elevate them in undertaking this war.*'

*How lovely is the king Messiah, who is to rise from the house of Judah.
He girds his loins and goes out to wage war on those who hate him,
killing kings and rulers...
and reddening the mountains with the blood of their slain.
With his garments dipped in blood,
he is like one who treads grapes in the wine press¹³*

However, the NT and the histories of Josephus each imply that the Messiah was not this foreseen nationalist leader, but rather a pacifist who encouraged cooperation with the Rome. For example, consider Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:41 '*when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go along two.*'

Roman military law permitted its soldiers to 'conscript,' that is demand, civilians to carry their sixty-five pound packs for a length of one mile. Roman roads had mile markers (milestones) so that there would be no dispute over whether or not this requirement had been met. Why would the Messiah foreseen by Judaism's xenophobic world-ruler prophecies urge Jews to 'go the extra mile' for the Roman Army?

When one compares the militaristic Messiah described in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other early Judaic literature with the pacifistic Messiah described in the NT and Josephus' *Testimonium*, one aspect of the lost history of Judea seems visible. An intellectual battle was waged over the nature of the Messiah. The NT and Josephus stood together on one side of this struggle, each claiming that a pacifistic Messiah had appeared who had advocated cooperation with Rome. On the other side of this theological divide stood the Jewish Zealots who awaited a militaristic Messiah to lead them against Rome.

Among Christianity's oldest surviving records is the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, dated to 96 CE. The letter was purportedly written by (Pope) Clement the First to a congregation of Christians who had apparently rebelled against the Church's authority. It shows that even at the onset of the religion the bishop of Rome was able to give orders to the Church of Corinth. It is notable that the 'Church of Rome,' in the

¹² Damascus Covenant (CD) 19.5-13,32-20.1

¹³ Targum, pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 49:10-12

earliest document revealing the nature of its authority structure, used the Roman army as an example of the kind of discipline and obedience that it expected from other churches and their members.

*The Church of God which sojourneth in Rome to the Church of God which sojourneth in Corinth,*¹⁴ ...*Let us mark the soldiers that are enlisted under our rulers, how exactly, how readily, how submissively, they execute the orders given them. All are not prefects, nor rulers of thousands, nor rulers of hundreds, nor rulers of fifties, and so forth; but each man in his own rank executeth the orders given by the king and the governors.*

But how did Church's Roman military-type authority structure come into existence? Who established it and who gave the bishops such absolute control? Cyprian wrote ...*the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop... and if anyone is not with the bishop, that person is not in the Church.*¹⁵ And why was Rome, supposedly the center of Christian persecution, chosen for the Church's headquarters?

A Roman origin would explain why the 'Bishop of Rome' was later made the 'Supreme Pontiff' of the church. And why Rome became its headquarters. It would explain how a Judean cult eventually became the State religion of the Roman Empire. A Roman origin would also explain why so many members of a Roman imperial family, the Flavians, were recorded as being among the first Christians. The Flavians would have been 'among' the first Christians because, having invented the religion, they were, in fact, the first Christians.

When considering a Flavian invention of Christianity, one should bear in mind that the Flavian emperors were 'gods' who often created religions. The oath that they swore when being ordained emperor began with the instruction that they would do 'all things divine... in the interests of the empire.' The Arch of Titus, which commemorates Titus' destruction of Jerusalem, is inscribed with the following statement:

*SENATUS POPULUSQUE ROMANUS DIVO TITO. DIVI VESPASIANI. F
VESPASIANO AUGUST*

*'The Senate and People of Rome, to the God Titus, son of the God
Vespasian'*

Fragments of the written pronouncement given in 69 AD by the prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Alexander, in which he recognized Vespasian as the new Emperor, are still in existence. Vespasian is referred to in them as 'the divine Caesar' and 'Lord.'

Josephus also believed that Vespasian was a divine person. He claimed that Judaism's Messianic prophecies foretold that Vespasian would become the Lord of 'all mankind.' This indicates that in the eyes of Josephus, Vespasian was not only the

¹⁴ 1Clem prologue:1

¹⁵ Cyprian, EP66,8,3

‘Jesus,’ or savior of Judea, but that was also the ‘Christ,’ the Greek word for the Messiah that the Judaic world-ruler prophecies foresaw.

*Thou, O Vespasian, thinkest no more than that thou hast taken Josephus himself captive; but I come to thee as a messenger of greater tidings; for had not I been sent by God to thee... Thou, O Vespasian, art Caesar and emperor, thou, and this thy son. Bind me now still faster, and keep me for thyself, for thou, O Caesar, are not only lord over me, but over the land and the sea, and all mankind.*¹⁶

Thus, Josephus not only ‘foresaw’ Vespasian as God’s choice to be the Lord of ‘all mankind’ but that God had specifically designated him as his messenger to Vespasian. Notably, Josephus, in proclaiming himself God’s minister, also described an ending of God’s ‘contract’ with Judaism that was quite similar to the position that the NT takes concerning Christianity. The only difference being that Josephus believed that God’s ‘good fortune’ had gone over, not to Christianity, but to Rome and its imperial family, the Flavians.

*Since it pleaseth thee, who hast created the Jewish nation, to depress the same, and since all their good fortune is gone over to the Romans, and since thou hast made choice of this soul of mine to foretell what is to come to pass hereafter, I willingly give them my hands, and am content to live. And I protest openly that I do not go over to the Romans as a deserter of the Jews, but as a minister from thee.*¹⁷

Scholars have dismissed Josephus’ application of Judaism’s Messianic prophecies to Caesar as simple flattery. We disagree, and shall show that not only did Josephus ‘believe’ Vespasian to be ‘god,’ and Titus, therefore the ‘son of god,’ but that his histories were entirely constructed to demonstrate that very fact.

There was nothing unusual with Josephus’ recognition that Vespasian was a god. The Flavians gods were a continuation of the tradition of establishing Emperors as gods begun by the Julio-Claudian line of Roman Emperors. Julius Caesar, the first *diuus* (divine) of that line, claimed to have been descended from Venus. The Roman Senate is said to have decreed that Julius Caesar was a god because a comet appeared shortly after his death thus demonstrating his divinity.

In 80 AD, Titus established an imperial cult for his father, who had passed away during the pervious year. The cult was politically important to Titus Vespasian’s deification would break the chain of divine succession held by the Julio-Claudian line since Julius Caesar and thereby secure the throne for the Flavians.

As only the Roman Senate could bestow the title of *diuus*, Titus first needed to convince that body that Vespasian’s life had been that of a god. There was evidently some difficulty in arranging this, however, as Vespasian’s *consecratio* did not occur until

¹⁶ Josephus War 3,399

¹⁷ Josephus, War 3,354

six months after his death, an unusually long interval.¹⁸ Titus also created a priesthood, the *flamines*, to administer the cult. The cult of Vespasian was not isolated to Rome and appointments were made throughout the provinces. In the areas surrounding Judea the cult was overseen by a Roman bureaucracy called the *Commune Asiae*. Notably, all seven of the Christian ‘churches of Asia’ mentioned in Revelation 1:11 were known to have had agencies of the *Commune* located within them.

Upon her death, Titus also secured the deification of his sister, Domitilla. In going through the process of deifying his father and sister and establishing their cults, Titus received an education in a skill few humans have ever possessed. He learned how to create a religion. Titus may have also been unusually literate. He claimed to take shorthand faster than any secretary and to be able to ‘forge any man’s signature’ and stated that under different circumstances he could have become ‘the greatest forger in history.’¹⁹

Titus’ brother Domitian, who succeeded him as emperor, also used religion to his advantage. In addition to deifying his brother, Domitian attempted to link himself to Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman Empire, by having the Senate decree that the god had mandated his rule. Fears wrote that the purpose for this was to show that ‘*the emperor and his policies are above human criticism because his power is rooted not in human institutions but in his election by the supreme god of the state*’ further describing this religious innovation as an ‘*autocratic political concept.*’²⁰

Not only did the Flavians create religions, they performed miracles. In the following passage from Tacitus, Vespasian is recorded as curing one man’s blindness and another’s withered limb, miracles also performed by Jesus.

*One of the common people of Alexandria, well known for his blindness, threw himself at the Emperor's knees, and implored him with groans to heal his infirmity. ...He begged Vespasian that he would deign to moisten his cheeks and eye-balls with his spittle. Another with a diseased hand, at the counsel of the same God, prayed that the limb might feel the print of a Caesar's foot. And so Vespasian, supposing that all things were possible to his good fortune, and that nothing was any longer past belief, with a joyful countenance, amid the intense expectation of the multitude of bystanders, accomplished what was required. The hand was instantly restored to its use, and the light of day again shone upon the blind. Persons actually present attest both facts, even now when nothing is to be gained by falsehood.*²¹

The gospels record that Jesus also used this method of curing blindness, that is by placing spittle on his eyelids.

¹⁸ Titus, Jones, 1984 p 152

¹⁹ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, Titus para. 4

²⁰ *Jupiter Fears*, p 81

²¹ Tacitus, *The Histories*, Book IV 109 AD

After thus speaking, He spat on the ground, and then, kneading the dust and spittle into clay, He smeared the clay over the man's eyes and said to him, 'Go and wash in the pool of Siloam' --the name means 'Sent.' So he went and washed his eyes, and returned able to see. [John 9:6-7]

There were other stories circulated about Vespasian that suggested his divinity. One involved a stray dog dropping a human hand at Vespasian's feet. The hand was a symbol of power to first century Romans. Another tale described an ox coming into Vespasian's dining room and literally falling at the Emperor's feet and lowering his neck as if in recognition to whom sacrifice was due.²²

Circulating tales that suggested that that they were gods was no doubt thought to be a good tonic for the *hoi polloi* by the Flavians. The more 'divine' an emperor was seen by his subjects, the easier for him to maintain his control over them. The Flavians certainly focused on manipulating the masses. To promote their policy of 'bread and circuses' they built the Coliseum where they staged gladiatorial and wild beast shows involving mass slaughter. It is interesting to consider that like their imperial cults and the fables that portrayed them as divine, Christianity can be said to have served the Flavians in that it replaced a militaristic religion that had resisted them with one that was pacifistic and urged its followers to 'give unto to Caesar what is Caesar's.'

Imperial cults that portrayed Roman emperors as gods and workers of miracles appear to have been created solely because they were politically useful. Religious emotion seems not to have been connected with any of the Roman imperial cults. No evidence of any spontaneous offerings attesting to the sincerity of the worshippers has ever been discovered.

The advantage of converting of one's family into a succession of gods appealed to many Roman emperors: 36 of the 60 emperors from Augustus to Constantine and 27 members of their families were apotheosized and received the title of *diuus* (divine).²³ Of course, inventors of fictitious religions must have a certain cynicism in regard to the sacred. Vespasian is quoted on his deathbed as saying '*Oh my, I must be turning into a god!*'

Pliny commented upon the cynicism that the Flavians held toward the religions that they had created. Notice in the following quote Pliny's understanding that Titus had made himself a 'son of a god.'

*Titus deified Vespasian and Domitian Titus, but only so that one would be the son of a god and the other a brother of a god.*²⁴

The cynicism that the patrician class felt toward religion was a subject of the satires of the Roman poet, Juvenal. While the exact dates of Juvenal's birth and death are

²² *The Long year AD69 Wellesley p121*

²³ *Price, Noble Funerals to Divine Cult 57*

²⁴ Pan 11. 1

unknown he is believed that he lived during the era of the Flavians. One of his satires concerns Agrippa and Bernice, the mistress of Titus.²⁵ There is also a tradition that Juvenal was banished from Rome by Domitian.

Sophisticated Romans like those Juvenal wrote about did not believe in the gods but rather in fortune and fate. The prevailing ethos of the upper class was that the world was either ruled by blind chance or immutable destiny.

*'Fortune has no divinity, could we but see it: it's we, we ourselves, who make her a goddess, and set her in the heavens.'*²⁶

Judging from the works of Juvenal, many Romans saw all religious belief as ridiculous, including their own.

*Just hark at those loud denials, observe the assurance of the lying face
He'll swear by the Sun's rays, by Jupiter thunderbolts,
by the lance of Mars, by the arrows of Delphic Apollo,
by the quiver and shafts of Diana, the virgin huntress,
by the trident of Neptune, Our Father of the Aegean:
he'll throw in Hercules' bows and the spear of Minerva,
the armories of Olympus down til their very last item:
and if he's a father, he'll cry; 'May I eat my own son's noodle-
poor child! – well boiled and soured in a vinaigrette dressing!'*²⁷

Juvenal was also cynical towards Judaism. His attitude regarding the religion suggests that many within the patrician class saw the religion and, no doubt, its offspring Christianity, as barbaric cults.

*...A palsied Jewess, parking her haybox outside, comes begging in a breathy whisper. She interprets Jerusalem's laws, she's the tree's high priestess... She likewise fills her palm but more sparingly: Jews will sell you whatever dreams you like for a few coppers.*²⁸

Given this cynicism by patricians towards religion, it is odd that so many members of the Flavian family were recorded as having been among Christianity's first members. Why was a Judaic cult that advocated meekness and poverty so attractive to a family that practiced neither? The tradition connecting early Christianity and the Flavian family is based upon solid evidence but has been little commented upon by scholars.

The best known of the 'Christian Flavians' was (Pope) Clement the first. He is described within the Roman Catholic Encyclopedia as the first Pope about 'whom

²⁵ Juvenal, Satire VI, 155

²⁶ Juvenal, Satire X 365

²⁷ Juvenal XIII, 77-86

²⁸ Juvenal VI 550. The haybox was used to keep food warm for the sabbath, to avoid cooking. The reference to the tree is uncertain but possibly a reference to the *menorah*, the seven branched candlestick.

anything definite is known,'²⁹ and was recorded by early church literature as being a member of the Flavian family.

Pope Clement was the first Pope who had individuals known to history refer to him and who left behind written works. He purportedly wrote the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, quoted above. Thus, Clement is of great significance to the Church's history. In fact, while the Catholic Encyclopedia currently lists Clement as the fourth 'Bishop of Rome' or Pope, this was not the position of many early church scholars. St. Jerome wrote that in his time '*most of the Latins*'³⁰ held that Clement had been the direct successor of Peter. Tertullian also knew of this tradition, he wrote: '*the church of Rome records that Clement was ordained by Peter.*'³¹ Origen, Eusebius, and Epiphanius also placed Clement at the very beginning of the Roman church, each of them stating that Clement had been the 'fellow laborer' of the Apostle Paul.

The list of Popes given by Irenaeus that names Clement as the fourth Pope has been seen by scholars as suspect and it is notable that the Roman Church choose to use it as its official history. This list names a 'Linus' as the second Pope, followed by an 'Anakletus' and then Clement. The list stems from Irenaeus who identifies 'Linus the Pope' as the Linus mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21. Scholars have speculated that Irenaeus chose Linus simply because he was the last male Paul named mentioned in the epistle, which supposedly was written immediately before his martyrdom. The provenance of Pope Anakletus may be no better. In Titus, the epistle that immediately follows Timothy in the canon, it is stated, 'the bishop shall be irreproachable.' Irreproachable is in Greek, 'anenkletus.'³²

Irenaeus may not have known who the Popes between Peter and Clement were and therefore had to invent names for them. If this was the case, then after creating 'Linus' as Peter's successor because he was the last male Paul named, he continued scanning through the NT until he came across the phrase 'the bishop shall be irreproachable.' That then became the name of the next Bishop of Rome – 'Irreproachable.' This may have caused his imagination to have become strained as the name he chose for the sixth Pope in his list was someone named 'Sixus' meaning, sixth.

It also seems strange that the Roman Church chose to use Irenaeus' list considering that it originated in the east. The understanding that Clement was the second Pope is no weaker historically and was the understanding of the Papal sequence known in Rome. Perhaps early Church officials preferred not to use a list that stated that Clement was Peter's direct successor because of the tradition that he was a member of the Flavian family.

The notion that Pope Clement was a Flavian was recorded in the Acts of Saints Nereus and Achilleus, a fifth or sixth century work based upon even earlier traditions.

²⁹ [Http://www.nemadvent.org](http://www.nemadvent.org)

³⁰ (De viris illustr. xv).

³¹ *Tertullian De Praescr. Haer., c. xxxii*

³² Wells, Jesus Legend p228.

This work directly linked the Flavian family to Christianity. A fact that is noted within the Catholic Church's own encyclopedia:

Titus Flavius Sabinus, consul in 82, put to death by Domitian (the Emperor Titus' brother}, whose sister he had married. Pope Clement is represented as his son in the Acts of Sts. Nereus and Achilleus.
The Catholic Encyclopedia ³³

Titus Flavius Sabinus' brother, Clemens, was also linked to Christianity. The Acts of Saint Nereus and Achilleus stating that Clemens was a Christian martyr. Clemens is believed to have married his first cousin, Flavia Domitilla, Vespasian's granddaughter, who was yet another Christian Flavian. In the case of Flavia Domitilla there is extant evidence linking her to Christianity. The oldest Christian burial site in Rome has inscriptions naming her as its founder.

The catacomb of Domitilla is shown by existing inscriptions to have been founded by her. Owing to the purely legendary character of these Acts, we cannot use them as an argument to aid in the controversy as to whether there were two Christians of the name of Domitilla in the family of the Christian Flavians, or only one, the wife of the Consul Flavius Clemens. The Catholic Encyclopedia ³⁴

The Talmud records the genealogy of Christianity's purported first Pope differently than the Acts of Saint Nereus and Achilleus. It records that the 'Flavia Domitilla' who was the mother of 'Clemens' (Kalonymos) was not Titus' niece but rather his sister. Thereby linking Peter's purported successor a generation closer to Titus, perhaps placing him within his very household. ³⁵

Nereus and Achilleus, the authors of their 'Acts,' are listed within the Catholic Encyclopedia as among the religion's first martyrs and were also linked to the Flavian family.

The old Roman lists, of the fifth century, and which passed over into the Martyrologium Hieronymianum, contain the names of the two martyrs Nereus and Achilleus, whose grave was in the Catacomb of Domitilla on the Via Argentina.

The acts of these martyrs, ...place their death in the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries. ... According to these legends Nereus and Achilleus were eunuchs and chamberlains of Flavia Domitilla, a niece of the Emperor Domitian...The graves of these two martyrs were on an estate of the Lady Domitilla...

...we may conclude that they are among the most ancient martyrs of the Roman Church, and stand in very near relation to the Flavian family, of which Domitilla, the foundress of the catacomb, was a member. In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul

³³ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12137a.htm>

³⁴ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12137a.htm>

³⁵ Talmud Babli, Gitt. 56b-57a

mentions a Nereus with his sister, to whom he sends greetings. The Catholic Encyclopedia³⁶

This reference by Paul to a 'Nereus' and his sister is interesting. Tradition maintains that Domitian killed several family members who were Christians, and someone named Acilius Glabrio, about whom there is also a tradition of having been a Christian. All of which permits the conjecture that the 'Nereus' mentioned by Paul may have been the author of the 'Acts,' and that the 'Achilleus,' Domitian slew may have been Nereus' literary partner.

Another individual linked to both Christianity and the Flavian family was Bernice, the sister of Agrippa, who is actually described in the NT as having known the Apostle Paul. She became Titus' mistress and was living with him at the Flavian court in 75AD, the same time Josephus was purportedly writing War of the Jews.

Flavius Josephus, an adopted member of the family, also had a connection to the beginnings of Christianity. His works provided the NT with its primary 'independent' historical documentation and were certainly read by his imperial patrons. In fact, Titus ordered the publication of War of the Jews. In his autobiography, Josephus wrote that Titus '*was so desirous that the knowledge of these affairs should be taken from these books alone, that he affixed his own signature to them and gave orders for their publication.*'³⁷

Perhaps the most unusual connection between Christianity and the Flavians, however, is the fact that Titus Flavius fulfilled all of Jesus' doomsday prophecies. As mentioned above, the parallels between the description of Titus' campaign in War of the Jews and Jesus' prophecies caused early Church scholars to believe that Christ had seen into the future. The destruction of the temple, the encircling of Jerusalem with a wall, the towns of Galilee being 'brought low,' the destruction of what Jesus described as the 'wicked generation,' etc. had all been prophesized by Jesus and then came to pass during Titus' military campaign through Judea. A campaign that, like Jesus' ministry, began in Galilee and ended in Jerusalem.

Thus the Flavians are linked to Christianity by a unusual number of facts and traditions. Early Church documents flatly stating that the family produced some of the religion's first martyrs and the Pope who succeeded Peter. They created much of the literature that provided documentation for the religion, were responsible for its oldest known cemetery and housed individuals named in the NT within their imperial court. Further, the family was responsible for Jesus' apocalyptic prophecies having 'come to pass.'

These connections clearly deserve more attention from scholars than they have received. The Flavians, after all, would have enjoyed seeing a cult of pacifism replace

³⁶ (*Rom., xvi, 15*),

³⁷ Josephus Life (65/363) Whiston

the militaristic Judaism that waged war against them and were known to have created a number of religions.

Some curiosity seems in order.

We believe that some explanation is required as to how the numerous traditions linking an obscure Judean cult to the imperial family came about. Connections that included not merely converts to the religion, but if the Acts of Nereus and Achilleus and Eusebius are to be believed, the direct successor to Peter.

If Christianity was invented by the Flavians to assist them in their struggle with Judaism, it would have merely been a variation upon a long established theme. Using religion for the good of the state was a Roman technique long before the Flavians. In the following quote, which could well have been studied by the young Titus Flavius during his education at the imperial court, Cicero not only prefigures much of Christian theology but also actually advocates for the State to ‘persuade’ the masses into adapting the theology most appropriate for the empire.

We must persuade our citizens that the gods are the lords and rulers of all things and what is done, is done by their will and authority; and they are the great benefactors of men, and know who everyone is, and what he does, and what sins he commits, and what he intends to do, and with what piety he fulfills his religious duties.

Rome did not attempt to replace the gods of its provinces but to absorb them. By the end of the first century Rome had accumulated so many foreign gods that virtually every day of the year celebrated some divinity. Roman citizens were encouraged to give offerings to all of these gods as a way of maintaining ‘Pax Deorum,’ the peace of the gods. A condition that the imperial family saw as beneficial to the empire.

The Romans also used religion as a tool to assist them in conquest. The leader of the Roman army, the consul, was a religious leader capable of communicating with the gods. The Romans developed a specific technique for inducing the gods of their enemy to defect to Rome. This particular ritual, the *devotio*, called for a sacrifice of a Roman, who would be sacrificed to all of the gods including those of the enemy. In this way the Romans sought to not only neutralize their opponents’ divine assistance but to have their enemies gods ‘defect’ to Rome.

Thus, when Rome went to war with the religious zealots in Judea it had a long tradition of absorbing the religions of its opponents. If Rome did invent Christianity, it would have been simply another example of the Roman tradition of neutralizing an enemy’s religion by making it their own rather than fighting against it. Rome would have simply transformed the militant Judaism of first century Palestine into a pacifist religion so as to make it able to be absorbed into the empire.

One Roman imperial family was involved in the creation of a religion that appears to have been based upon Christianity. Julia Domna, the wife of the Emperor Septimius

Severus, was recorded as having commissioned the sophist, Flavius Philostratus, to write the Life of Apollonius of Tyana around 205 AD.

The similarities between Philostratus' 'gospels' and the NT seem to demonstrate that Apollonius was modeled upon Jesus. Apollonius' birth was, like Jesus,' proceeded by an Annunciation, his coming being announced to his mother by an Archangel. The messengers of Apollo sang at his birth, as the angels did at the birth of Jesus. Apollonius displayed precocity in religious matters, went through a period of preparation; followed by a period of public good works and miracles, then a passion and a resurrection; and finally an ascension. Apollonius was even said to have been born in the year of the Census of Quirinus, the year the NT gives for the birth of Jesus.

Apollonius traveled about in the manner of Jesus, performing miracles and doing good works, all the while accompanied by his disciples. And, like Jesus, he also drove out of evil spirits. In a passage akin to the NT passages describing Jesus' encounter with the demoniac of Gadara, Apollonius meets a possessed man through whom the devil, unable to face the Sage, utters cries of terror and rage.

Compared to Jesus, Apollonius was a well-documented character with many contemporary writers other than Philostratus commenting on his life and with numerous temples having been built to him. Hierocles, a provincial governor under Emperor Diocletian, wrote a book to show that Apollonius had been a great sage, a worker of miracles, and an exorcist. Philostratus claimed to have created his Gospel from memoirs of Apollonius composed by his disciples Damis and Maximus.

Philostratus also recorded that there had been a relationship between Apollonius and the Flavians. He recorded that Apollonius, like Josephus, had predicted that Vespasian would one day become Emperor. Philostratus also claimed that the sage wrote to Titus soon after he had become Emperor, counseling moderation in his government, to which Titus replied: *In my own name and in the name of my country I give you thanks, and will be mindful of those things. I have, indeed, taken Jerusalem, but you have captured me.*

The differences between Apollonius and Jesus are also important as they suggest the reason that the imperial family promoted a cult to replace Christianity. Apollonius was said to have developed his theology in India, not Judea, and was therefore not monotheistic. He was tolerant of the numerous Roman gods, as his very name 'Apollonius' proclaimed.

Some scholars of the last three centuries have adopted the view that Philostratus intended the gospel of Apollonius as a counterblast to that of the Christian Gospel. Specifically that the imperial family wished to challenge the widespread advance of monotheistic Christianity by promoting a religion that would accept the many gods of the Roman Empire, which of course, included Roman Emperors. For example, Biggs described the religion of Apollonius as follows:

It is the story of the Gospel corrected and improved which offered the terms the new Imperial religion was prepared to offer the Church. ³⁸

The cult of Apollonius is problematic for Christianity in that the imperial family was involved in the creation of a religion that was a copy of it. This at least permits the conjecture that Jesus too may have also been an invention of the imperial family. Julia Domna and Severus were well aware of Christianity. They were recorded as having statues of Jesus, Apollonius, Abraham, and Orpheus in their private chapel.³⁹

Our suspicion regarding the cult of Apollonius is that it was created as an improvement of Christianity. In other words, the cult of Apollonius was created to be a mass religion like Christianity but one that allowed the worship of Roman emperors. By the beginning of the third century Judaism was no longer a threat to the Roman Empire and the imperial family felt free to replace it with a religion that would have all of the advantages to the state of pacifistic Christianity but would also permit worship of the Emperors. The momentum of Christianity was too great however and the cult of Apollonius died out after Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

In any event, the imperial family certainly did attempt to transform Judaism. As early as Julius Caesar, the Roman emperor claimed personal authority over the religion and was selecting its High Priests. In the passage below note that the emperor describes himself as both dictator and high priest.

*Caius Julius Caesar, imperator and high priest, and dictator sendeth greeting...I will that Hyrcanus, the son of Alexander, and his children...have the high priesthood of the Jews for ever...I also ordain that he and his children retain whatsoever privileges belong to the office of high priest...and if at any time hereafter there arise any questions about the Jewish customs, I will that he determine the same...*⁴⁰

Roman emperors appointed all of the High Priests recorded within the NT from a restricted circle of families who were allied to Rome. By selecting the individual who would 'determine' any issue of 'Jewish customs' Caesar was managing Jewish theology for his own self-interest. Of course, what other way would a Caesar have managed a religion?

Rome exercised control over the religion in a way that was unique in the history of its provincial governments. Rome micro-managed Second Temple Judaism to the extent of even determining when its priests could wear their holy vestments.

... after whom the Romans, when they entered on the government, took possession of these vestments of the high priest, and had them repositied in a stone-chamber, under the seal of the priests, and of the keepers of the temple, the captain of the guard lighting a lamp there every day; and seven days before a festival they were delivered to them by the

³⁸ Bigg, *The Chr. Platonists*, 293

³⁹ Lampridius, *Vita Severi*, xxix

⁴⁰ 4) Flavius Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 14.190 (Whiston)

captain of the guard, when the high priest having purified them, and made use of them, laid them up again in the same chamber where they had been laid up before, and this the very next day after the feast was over. This was the practice at the three yearly festivals...

In spite of these efforts, Rome's normal policy of absorbing the gods of its provinces did not succeed in Judea. Judaism would not permit its God to be just one among many and Rome was forced to battle one Jewish insurrection after another. Their effort to control Judaism by naming its High Priests having failed, it would have been a natural step for the imperial family to control the religion by rewriting its Torah.

We believe that they took this step and created the gospels to initiate a version of Judaism more acceptable to the Empire. A religion that instead of waging war against its enemies would 'turn the other cheek.'

The theory of a Roman invention of Christianity does not originate with this work. Bruno Bauer, a nineteenth century German scholar, believed that Christianity was an attempt by Rome to create a mass religion that encouraged slaves to accept their station in life. In our era, Robert Eisenman concluded that the NT was the literature of a Judaic Messianic movement rewritten by intellectuals with a pro-Roman perspective. While this work owes a debt to both of these scholars, particularly to Dr. Eisenman's work James the Brother of Jesus, it presents a completely new way of understanding the NT.

We shall show that the gospels were created to be understood on two levels. On its surface level it is, of course, a description of the ministry of a miracle-working Messiah who rose from the dead. However, the NT was also designed to be understood in another way, that is as a satire of Titus Flavius' military campaign through Judea. The proof of this is simply that Jesus and Titus shared parallel experiences at the same locations and in the same sequence. Parallels that were both too exact and too complex to have occurred by chance. That this fact has been overlooked for two millennia represents a blind spot in scholarship as large as it has been long-lived.

The satirical level of the NT was designed to become visible by simply reading the NT in conjunction with War of the Jews. In fact, these two works were created as a unified piece of literature whose characters and stories interact. Their interaction gives many of Jesus' sayings a comical meaning and also creates a series of puzzles whose solutions reveal the real identities of the NT's characters. Understanding the NT's comic level reveals, for example, that the Apostles Simon and John were cruel lampoons of Simon and John, the leaders of the Jewish rebellion.

We are also able to demonstrate that that Josephus intentionally falsified the dates of events in War of the Jews so as to create the impression that the prophecies of the prophet Daniel came to pass during the war between the Romans and the Jews. This was

done so as to provide ‘proof’ for the NT’s claim that the ‘Son of God’ foreseen by Daniel was Jesus.⁴¹

The histories of Josephus and the NT are perhaps the most scrutinized works in literature and we encourage skepticism of our claim to have discovered a new, ‘true’ way of understanding them. Throughout the ages, the NT has been a virtual intellectual kaleidoscope with fantastic prophesies and codes having often been ‘discovered’ within its words. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence and we would not be presenting this work if we could not meet that standard.

However, it simply was the case that Flavians possessed both the motivation and the capacity to create a version of Judaism aligned with their interests. Any honest seeker of Christianity’s origin must, therefore, at least consider the possibility that they produced the NT. Indeed, an oft-cited principle about history is that the victors write it. As the Flavians were the victors in first-century Judea are they not be the first group to investigate?

This is why we should attempt to understand the gospels as they would have been understood by someone familiar with the conquest of Judea by Titus Flavius, Emperor of Rome. And with this perspective, a completely different meaning of the gospels becomes clear.

They are a monument to Caesar.

⁴¹ That the link that Josephus created between Jesus and Daniel is not well known today is strange considering that earlier scholars were well aware of it and it was designed to be easily seen. It had have been obvious as Christianity was invented for an audience that was uneducated and was encouraged to remain that way.

For example, Celsus, the pagan critic of Christianity wrote in 180AD:
(Christians say) *do not ask questions, only believe. Faith will save you. Wisdom is an evil thing and foolishness good.*⁴¹ Tertullian also remarked that: ‘*after one has believed, there is but one thing more to be believed namely that there is nothing more to be believed.*’

2. THE SON OF MARY WHO WAS A PASSOVER SACRIFICE

We believe that the NT was created by the intellectual circle that surrounded Titus Flavius, second of the Flavian emperors. The basis for this claim is our discovery that Jesus' ministry was created as a satire of the military campaign that Titus made through Judea that concluded with his destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE.

To come to this understanding it was necessary to make a series of discoveries, with each new insight providing the capacity to make the next. This process began when we came across the following passage within War of the Jews, and concluded that the parallels between the 'son of Mary' described within the passage and the 'son of Mary' in the gospels were too precise to have been the product of circumstance.

While readers can judge this claim for themselves, it should be noted that Josephus wrote during an age in which allegory was regarded as a science. Educated readers were expected to be able to understand 'another' meaning within religious and historical literature. The Apostle Paul, for example, stated that passages from the Hebrew Scriptures were allegories that looked forward to Christ's birth. We believe that Josephus is using allegory within the following passage to reveal something else about Jesus.

The passage begins with Josephus speaking in the first person. He describes the difficulty he is having in writing about an exceptionally grisly event caused by the famine that occurred during by the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

*'But why do I describe the shameless impudence that the famine brought on men in their eating inanimate things, while I am going to relate a matter of fact, the like to which no history relates, either among the Greeks or Barbarians? It is horrible to speak of it, and incredible when heard. I had indeed willingly omitted this calamity of ours, that I might not seem to deliver what is so portentous to posterity, but that I have innumerable witnesses to it in my own age; and besides, my country would have had little reason to thank me for suppressing the miseries that she underwent at this time.'*⁴²

He then describes the event.

'There was a certain woman that dwelt beyond Jordan, her name was Mary; her father was Eleazar, of the village Bethzob, which signifies the house of Hyssop. She was eminent for her family and her wealth, and had fled away to Jerusalem with the rest of the multitude, and was with them besieged therein at this time. The other effects of this woman had been already seized upon, such I mean as she had brought with her out of Perea, and removed to the city. What she had treasured up besides, as also what food she had contrived to save, had been also carried off by the rapacious guards, who came

⁴² War 6,3, 200 Whiston

every day running into her house for that purpose. This put the poor woman into a very great passion, and by the frequent reproaches and imprecations she cast at these rapacious villains, she had provoked them to anger against her; but none of them, either out of the indignation she had raised against herself, or out of commiseration of her case, would take away her life; and if she found any food, she perceived her labors were for others, and not for herself; and it was now become impossible for her any way to find any more food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels and marrow, when also her passion was fired to a degree beyond the famine itself; nor did she consult with any thing but with her passion and the necessity she was in. She then attempted a most unnatural thing; and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said,

‘O thou miserable infant! for whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this famine, and this sedition? As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves. This famine also will destroy us, even before that slavery comes upon us. Yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both the other. Come on; be thou my food, and be thou a fury to these seditious varlets, and a by-word to the world, which is all that is now wanting to complete the calamities of us Jews.’

As soon as she had said this, she slew her son, and then roasted him, and eat the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them, and withal uncovered what was left of her son. Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight, when she said to them,

‘This is mine own son, and what hath been done was mine own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not you pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother; but if you be so scrupulous, and do abominate this my sacrifice, as I have eaten the one half, let the rest be reserved for me also.’

After which those men went out trembling, being never so much affrighted at any thing as they were at this, and with some difficulty they left the rest of that meat to the mother.’⁴³

We would first note that while the passage may have been based on an actual event, Josephus seems to have invented the dialogue. Josephus described no witnesses to the speech Mary gave before she killed her son who could have passed along this dialogue to him. It is, of course, unlikely that a mother would have slain and eaten her son in the presence of others.

To see the satire that lies within this passage one must first understand the phrase: ‘Bethzob, which signifies the *House of Hyssop*.’

‘Beth’ is the Hebrew word for house and ‘Ezob’ is the Hebrew word for hyssop. Hyssop being the plant which Moses commanded the Israelites to use when

⁴³ War 6,3, 212 Whiston

marking their houses with the blood of the sacrificed Passover lamb. This mark identified the houses that the Angel of Death would ‘pass over.’

Then Moses called on the elders of Israel and said to them,

‘ Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.

*‘ And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin...’*⁴⁴

The phrase ‘*House of Hyssop*,’ therefore, brings to mind the Passover sacrifice, as hyssop was the plant used to mark the houses where there had been a sacrifice at the first Passover. Another statement within Josephus’ passage can also be seen as relating to the Passover sacrifice. After slaying her son, the woman *roasts* the body. In God’s instructions to Moses as to how to prepare the Passover sacrifice, God ordered the following:

*‘ Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire – its head with its legs and its entrails.’*⁴⁵

In the passage from War of the Jews we are analyzing, Mary’s son can be seen as a symbolic Passover lamb because the passage mentions both ‘hyssop’ and one of God’s instructions to Moses as to how to prepare the Passover sacrifice. That is, that the sacrifice must be roasted. This is the same method used by the author of the NT, who also denoted the symbolic Passover lamb by combining hyssop with an instruction to Moses regarding the preparation of the Passover lamb, that not one of its bones be broken.⁴⁶

Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop and put it to his mouth.

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘ It is finished!’ And bowing his head, He gave up his spirit.

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with him.

But when they came to Jesus and saw him already dead, and did not break His legs. {John 19}

⁴⁴ Exodus 12

⁴⁵ Exodus 12,9.

⁴⁶ The authors of the NT also made it clear that Jesus had become a ‘Passover Lamb’ by creating parallels between Judaism’s Passover and the ‘Passover’ of Christianity. Fifty days after the first Passover in Egypt, the Law was given to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, thus, fifty days after Christianity’s first ‘Passover’ the new Law was given. On the day that the Law was given to Moses, 3,000 died for worshipping the golden calf, on the day the new Law was given, the NT states that 3,000 were added into Christ and received life.

The identifying of the symbolic Passover Lamb at his crucifixion continued a theme begun at the Passover supper where Jesus asked the disciples to ‘eat’ of his flesh.

Also during the meal He took a Passover biscuit, blessed it, and broke it. He then gave it to them, saying, ‘Take this, it is my body.’ [Mark 14:22.27]

The NT’s ‘son of Mary’ who asked that his body be eaten is, thus, parallel the ‘son of Mary’ Josephus described, who actually had his flesh eaten.

Josephus connects the Mary described in his passage to the Mary in the NT with another of the details he records.. He describes the famine -- as Winston translates it above -- as having ‘pierced through Mary’s very bowels.’ In the NT, the concept of being ‘pierced through’ is predicted for only one person, Jesus’ mother Mary.

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, Behold this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also; that the reasonings in many hearts may be revealed.’) {Luke 2, 35}

The fact that the NT’s Mary and the Mary in War of the Jews both had their heart ‘pierced’ has, to our knowledge, never been noticed by another scholar. The reason for the oversight is important. Scholars have not noticed the parallel between the two Marys because it is more conceptual than linguistic. In the NT the Greek words making up the phrase are ‘*dierchomai psuche*’ while in War of the Jews they are ‘*dia splanchon*’ Though the words that indicate the ‘piercing through,’ ‘*dia*’⁴⁷ and ‘*dierchomai*,’ are linguistically parallel – ‘*dierchomai*’ being the future tense of ‘*dia*’ – the words used to describe the part of Mary that was to be ‘pierced through’ -- ‘*psuche*’ and ‘*splanchon*’ -- are different.

‘*Psuche*,’⁴⁸ the word translated in the NT above as ‘soul,’ can also mean heart, or the seat of emotions. ‘*Splanchon*,’ the Greek word that Josephus used to describe the part of Mary that was ‘pierced through,’ is translated above as ‘bowels,’ but is in fact a synonym for ‘*psuche*,’ and can mean either inward parts, especially the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys, or, like ‘*psuche*,’ it can indicate the seat of the emotions. Scholars have not seen this conceptual parallel between the two Marys simply because it was created using different words, even though the words mean the same thing.

In other words, if a prophet predicted that ‘next week a dog will bite a mailman’ and a historian recorded that during that week ‘a cur sank its teeth into a letter-carrier’ the prophecy, in fact, came to pass even though the prophet and the historian used different words to describe the event. The concept that the prophet predicted was the same as the one the historian recorded.

⁴⁷Strong's 1223

⁴⁸Strong's 5590

The 'fulfilled prophecy' of the 'bitten postman' cannot be seen, however, through an analysis of the individual words that the historian and the prophet used. Likewise, analyzing their individual words and nuances of grammar cannot see the satirical system that exists between the NT and War of the Jews. The system is made up of parallel concepts not parallel words.

Notice also that the parallel 'heart piercings' of the two Marys are prophetically logical. This is to say that the 'Mary' in the NT is the one being *predicted* to have her heart 'pierced through' in the future and the 'Mary' in War of the Jews, which occurred later, is the 'Mary' that 'fulfilled' this prophecy. If the NT had stated that Mary's heart *had been* 'pierced through' then the logic of this prophecy -- and notice also that the statement in the NT, though innocuous, *is* a prophecy -- would have been contradicted. As we shall show, one reason that the comic level of the NT has remained unseen is because scholars have failed to recognize the many seemingly 'innocuous' NT prophecies that are 'fulfilled' within War of the Jews.

Josephus has, thus, described a Mary who fulfilled the prophecy made for the Mary in the NT, in that she was 'pierced through the heart.' As this Mary is of the 'House of Hyssop' and her son is a 'sacrifice' that was 'roasted' and his flesh was eaten, he can certainly be likened to a human Passover Lamb, like the one established in the NT. Josephus' use of the word '*splanchon*' also builds upon this theme. '*Splanchon*' being the Greek word that was used to describe those parts of a sacrificed animal reserved to be eaten by *sacrificers* at the beginning of their feast. Yet another detail recorded by Josephus also links his passage to the NT. Josephus gives the name of Mary's father as Eleazar, which in Greek is Lazarus, the name of the individual whom Jesus raised from the dead.

Within this short passage Josephus has used a number of concepts and names that are parallel to those the NT recorded as having been associated with its symbolic Passover Lamb. These are: a mother named Mary, the fact that this Mary was 'pierced through the heart,' a son of Mary, hyssop, a son who is a sacrifice, a son whose flesh was eaten, a son who is to become a 'byword to the world,' one of Moses' instructions regarding the Passover Lamb, an individual named Lazarus (Eleazar), and Jerusalem as the location of the incident. It is unlikely that there is another passage in all of literature that contains, by chance, as many as half of this number of parallels with Christianity's Passover Lamb. When we first recognized these parallels we felt that the simplest explanation for such an improbable grouping was that it had been deliberately created and that, therefore, the passage was a lampoon of Jesus.

To argue against this proposition one must accept that Josephus unknowingly recorded this number of details relating to a concept as singular as that of Jesus the symbolic Passover lamb within a passage of less than two pages. However, as Josephus wrote War of the Jews while living in the Flavian court, a place where Christianity flourished, and was the sole historian to have recorded Jesus' existence, he would seem to be among the least likely authors to have accidentally recorded a satire of Christ.

For example, if the above passage had occurred within a work by Tolstoy there would be virtually complete agreement that the passage was a deliberate satire about Jesus. And notice that when viewed from such a perspective the passage would be certainly seen as comical, the irony in a Messiah who instructs his followers to symbolically 'eat of my flesh' actually having his flesh eaten by his mother being self-evident. That the passage is found within a work by an author so entwined with Christianity makes it even less likely that it was created accidentally.

Moreover, we shall show in a chapter below that Josephus' passage shares yet another parallel with Jesus, that of 'Mary's fine portion that was not taken away from her.' A parallel that when seen in combination with those given above puts the proposition that Josephus was intentionally satirizing Jesus beyond doubt.

However, if Josephus was lampooning Jesus, what was his purpose? An obvious explanation would be that he wrote the passage as a source of amusement to a group that could have understood the 'joke.' If this was the case, as Josephus was a member of the Flavian family the identity of this inner circle seems clear. If the passage was a deliberate satire of Jesus, it would have likely been created to be enjoyed by the Flavians and their inner circle.

This conclusion is especially plausible in light of the fact there were individuals within the Flavian court who were aware of Christianity at the time Josephus published War of the Jews. Further, there were four 'colleges' in Rome that were responsible for overseeing the religions within the empire. As religion was an important tool of the state these colleges had considerable political power. From Augustus on the Emperor was a member of all four colleges. One of these colleges, the *Quindecimviri Sacris Faciundis*, was responsible for the regulation of foreign cults in Rome.⁴⁹ All of the Flavian Emperors were members of this college and would have analyzed Christianity, a known 'foreign cult' in Rome, during this era.

Moreover, the most obvious reason to believe that there were Flavians familiar with Christianity is that so much the NT is related to the family. The Flavians brought about all of Jesus' doomsday prophecies - the destruction of the temple, the encircling of Jerusalem with a wall, the towns of Galilee being 'brought low,' and the destruction of what Jesus describes as the 'wicked generation.' Titus' mistress, Bernice, and Tiberius Alexander, his chief of staff during the siege of Jerusalem, are actually named within the NT. A cult whose dogma prophesized the accomplishments of the Flavians, that named individuals within its inner circle and actually had converts within the imperial family would certainly have been scrutinized during an era when the regulation of religion was so important that the emperor himself was involved with it.

Titus is known to have reviewed War of the Jews. As noted above, Josephus wrote that Titus so wished that '*the knowledge of these affairs should be taken from these books alone, that he affixed his own signature to them.*' Thus, Titus certainly had read the passage describing the Mary who ate her son and, considering the traditions

⁴⁹ *The Emperor and the Gods* Schowalter p60

connecting his family to Christianity, could well have understood its ironic parallels with Jesus.

Josephus' passage concerning the son of Mary whose flesh was eaten is the first of numerous examples that we shall present showing a consistent structure of comedy that runs between the NT and War of the Jews. Jesus seems to be speaking *symbolically* when he speaks of having his flesh eaten as a Passover sacrifice, however in Josephus' history we see that there is a *literal* interpretation to Jesus' words, which renders them blackly comic.

If the passage is a satire of Jesus then Josephus makes a number of statements within it that can be seen as *double entendres*. The reader need only read these statements with the perspective that the Flavians had invented Christianity and their satirical meaning will become obvious. Some of these are found in Josephus' narration.

'...it is horrible to speak of it, and incredible when heard.'

'while I am going to relate a matter of fact, the like to which no history relate...'

'... I might not seem to deliver what is so portentous to posterity,'

'I have innumerable witnesses to it in my own age '

However, if the passage is a satire of Jesus, the most important play on words is found within Mary's address to her 'miserable child' wherein she states:

'... be thou a fury to these seditious varlets and a by-word to the world, which is all that is now wanting to complete the calamities of us Jews. '

As we have suggested, this quote seems to be an invention of Josephus. Not only were there no witnesses who were described as having heard these words but they are, on their face, dubious. Would a mother who ate her son really wish him to become a by-word to the world? Further, taken literally, Mary's words seem incoherent. Why would her child become a 'fury' to the 'varlets,' that is the Jewish rebels, by his being cannibalized? And why would this '*complete the calamities of us Jews*'?

However, within the context of a lampoon of Jesus the meaning of the phrase becomes clear. Within such a context the author would be stating that Jesus would become a 'fury' to the Jews who have rebelled against Rome. He would also be stating that Jesus will become world renown, a '*by-word to the world,*' and that this will somehow '*complete the calamities*' of the Jews.

If the passage is a lampoon then the author is not merely ridiculing Christ. He is stating that Jesus will 'complete the calamity' of the Jews by becoming a by-word to the

world. Within this comic framework, he appears to be stating that the spread of Christianity will ‘complete’ the destruction of the Jews.

This interpretation indicates that Christianity was designed to promote anti-Semitism. A concept that is at least plausible historically. A cult that produced anti-Semitism would have both helped Rome prevent the Messianic Jews from spreading their rebellion as well as punished them by poisoning their future.

The NT has numerous passages that seem to deliberately cause Christians to hate Jews. Though Christian apologists have attempted to explain away such passages, there are clear examples of this technique throughout the NT. The most famous occurring in the gospel of Matthew, in which Pilate, after having ‘washed his hands of the blood of this just person’ told the Jews that they, not the Roman authorities, must be the ones responsible for crucifying Christ. According to the gospel of Matthew, the Jews responded thus:

*And all the people answered and said.
‘ His blood will be on us and on our children. ’*⁵⁰

Some scholars have speculated that later Christian redactors inserted the anti-Semitism passages into the NT out of hatred for the people who had crucified their Savior. Our interpretation of the above passage suggests the opposite. The NT was designed to promote anti-Semitism.

If Christianity had been created by the Flavians to ‘complete the calamities’ of the Jews, why had the religion’s inventors created a Messiah who was a symbolic Passover Lamb? The symbolism of John 19 and the passage from Josephus we have been analyzing, which set up the symbolic Passover lambs, both stem from Exodus 12 where God tells Moses and Aaron how to observe the Passover ‘throughout their generations.’

This is the ordinance of Passover: no foreigner shall eat it.

‘ But every man’s servant who is bought for money, and when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it.

In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.

‘ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.

‘ And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised and let him come near and keep it; and he shall be a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. Exodus 12

⁵⁰ Matthew 27,25

The above passage may have provided one of the motives behind the decision to establish a Messiah whose flesh may be eaten by all humanity. God's instruction to Moses regarding how only the circumcised may eat of the Passover lamb, is one social marker of the religious separateness of the Jewish people. Only Jews could eat of the Passover Lamb.

Judaism's requirement of religious separatism was one of the causes of the war with the Romans. By creating a Passover lamb for all mankind the NT was clearly, on one level, ending the religious separatism that made it impossible for Judaism to be absorbed into the Roman Empire. However, another passage within War of the Jews may reveal a more comic 'inspiration' for Christianity's human Passover Lamb.

Titus' use of the word 'repent' here is interesting. 'Repent' is, of course, one of the key words of Jesus' ministry and Caesar's usage of it brings the parallels between the chapter and the NT even tighter. Jesus stated repeatedly to 'Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand,' but exactly what sin did he wish the Jews to repent of? Jesus never gives an answer to this question. However, if our interpretation of the lampoon is correct, the sin of which Jesus wished the Jews to repent becomes obvious. It was their rebellion from Rome

3. FISHERS OF MEN: MEN WHO WERE CAUGHT LIKE FISH

When we first came across the passage from War of the Jews describing a son of Mary's whose flesh was eaten and recognized its linkage to Christianity, we were perplexed. The more we studied the passage the more we were convinced that it had been deliberately created as a lampoon. Further, if the passage was a satire, then it appeared to us to be stating that Jesus would not only become a 'byword,' but that this would somehow complete the 'calamity' of the Jews.

Therefore, the passage seemed more than just a lampoon of Jesus. If it was a satire it appeared to be a disclosure of a different origin of Christianity than the one that had been passed down to the modern era. That is, that Christianity had been created to be a 'calamity' upon the Jews. Our curiosity piqued, we began to analyze War of the Jews to determine if it contained other passages that could be seen as satirical disclosures regarding this different version of Christianity's origin.

It was during this analysis that it became clear that there were unusual parallels between the story line of Jesus' ministry and Titus' campaign through Judea. We also began to recognize that when viewed alongside the events described within War of the Jews, many of Jesus' words and deeds were humorous.

To give an example of the humor that NT creates when viewed in conjunction with the War of the Jews we point to the following passages.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is described at the 'onset' of his ministry asking Simon and Andrew and the 'sons of Zeb'edee' to 'follow me' and to become 'fishers of men.'

From that time Jesus began to preach. 'Repent,' He said, 'for the Kingdom of the Heavens is now close at hand.'

And walking along the shore of the Lake of Galilee He saw two brothers--Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew--throwing a drag-net into the Lake; for they were fishers.

And He said to them, 'Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'
[Mat 4:18 -19]

The same story is represented in the Gospel of Luke as follows:

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret.

and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.' [Luke 5: 9 - 10]

In another passage from the NT, Jesus foresees that cities on Gennesareth Lake (better known as the Sea of Galilee), will face tribulation for their wickedness.

Woe to you Chorazain! Woe to you Bethsaida!

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. [Matthew 11:23]

In War of the Jews, Josephus describes a sea battle where the Romans caught Jews like fish. The battle occurred at Gennesareth, where Titus attacked a band of Jewish rebels led by a leader named Jesus.

The people of the country call this lake the Lake of Gennesareth. ...they a great number of ships gotten ready upon the lake, that, in case they were beaten at land, they might retire to them; and they were so fitted up, that they might undertake a Sea-fight also. . But as the Romans were building a wall about their camp, Jesus and his party were neither affrighted at their number, nor at the good order they were in, but made a sally upon them;

*...As for those that endeavored to come to an actual fight, the Romans ran many of them through with their long poles. Sometimes the Romans leaped into their ships, with swords in their hands, and slew them; but when some of them met the vessels, the Romans caught them by the middle, and destroyed at once their ships and themselves who were taken in them. And for such as were drowning in the sea, if they lifted their heads up above the water, they were either killed by darts, or caught by the vessels; but if, in the desperate case they were in, they attempted to swim to their enemies, the Romans cut off either their heads or their hands;*⁵¹

A first century peasant upon hearing Jesus' doomsday prophecy regarding what would become to the inhabitant's of the cities on Gennesareth Lake and the passage above from War of the Jews, which describes their destruction, would have understood the juxtaposition as evidence of Christ's divinity. What Jesus had prophesized; Josephus had recorded as having come to pass.

However, an uneducated peasant could not have understood that there was another 'prophecy' that came to pass within the passages above. We are referring to Christ's exhortation to become 'fishers' or 'catchers' of men, while standing on spot where Jews would be caught like fish during the coming war with Rome.

⁵¹ War III, 10

Any patricians who knew the details of the sea battle at Gennesareth would have seen the irony in a Messiah who was named ‘Savior’ inventing the phrase ‘fishers of men’ while standing on the beach where the Jews were caught like fish. The comedy is self-evident.

These two fulfilled prophecies exemplify the two levels upon which the NT can be understood. Jesus’ prophesy regarding the destruction of Coracin and Capharnaum is completely straightforward and meant to be understood literally. It is one of the numerous prophecies made by Jesus concerning the coming war with Rome that Josephus recorded as having come to pass. A first century peasant listening to someone read from the NT and War of the Jews would conclude, sensibly, that Jesus was divine because he had seen into the future.

The other ‘fulfilled’ prophecy, that of Jesus predicting that his followers will become ‘fishers of men,’ is not so straightforward. It could only be understood by someone who, like the residents of the Flavian court, had knowledge of the details of the sea battle between the Romans and the Jewish fishermen at Gennesareth. Only such individuals could have seen the prophetic irony in Jesus using the expression while standing on the very beach where the Jews would later be caught like fish.

The describing of the Jewish rebels as ‘fish’ utilizes a metaphor used by Rabbis of the first century that also compared Jews to fish. For example, Rabban (chief Rabbi) Gamaliel spoke of his disciples using a parable in which they were compared to four different kinds of fish - an unclean fish, a clean fish, a fish from the river Jordan and a fish from the Sea. The metaphor was also used by Roman authors of this era. Juvenal, a contemporary Roman poet, specifically compares fugitive slaves and informers to fish.⁵²

The structure of the comedy is important. Jesus speaks of ‘catching men’ in a seemingly symbolic sense. Josephus then records that Jesus was indeed a ‘true’ prophet. His vision of ‘catching men’ at Gennesareth did come to pass. The joke being that it came to pass *literally* and not in the symbolic manner that Jesus seemed to have meant with the phrase. As we shall show, this is the most common structure of the humor created by reading the NT in conjunction with War of the Jews.

If the NT and War of the Jews are engaging in the interactive comedy regarding ‘fishing’ for men at Gennesareth that we are suggesting, they work to create another ‘fish’ joke. As mentioned above, Jesus predicted ‘woe’ for ‘Chorazin.’

Woe to you Chorazin! [Matthew 11:23]

Scholars have always presumed that Jesus was referring to a Galilean fishing village. Josephus, however, gave a different definition of the word ‘Chorazin.’

⁵² Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, Satire number 4.

*The country also that lies over against this lake hath the same name of Gennesareth... Some have thought it to be a vein of the Nile, because it produces the Coracin fish as well as the lake does which is near to Alexandria.*⁵³

So, while at the Sea of Galilee Jesus predicted ‘woe’ for the ‘Chorazain,’ and that ‘henceforth’ his disciples would be ‘fishing for men.’ Titus’ experience was comically parallel to Jesus’ prophecies in that he actually brought ‘woe’ to men he caught like ‘fish’ while at the Sea of Galilee. That is, he ‘fished’ for the Chorazainians, the inhabitants of the village named for the Coracin fish. If the comedy regarding ‘fishing’ that can be seen by juxtaposing the ‘onset’ of Jesus’ and Titus’ ‘ministries’ was deliberately created, it apparently stemmed from the fact that the Titus saw irony in his ‘fishing’ for the Chorazainians as they attempted to swim to safety.

We do not expect that the above examples, in and of themselves, to be seen as convincing evidence of our theory. It is, after all, quite possible that it was just an unfortunate circumstance that Jesus chose the beach at Gennesareth as the spot where he described his future ministry as ‘fishing for men.’ We present this example here because it so clearly demonstrates the two levels of interpretation that are possible while reading the NT in conjunction with War of the Jews, and because it occurs near the beginning of both Jesus’ and Titus’ ‘ministries.’ As we shall show, the sequence that events take place in the NT and War of the Jews has a meaning not heretofore understood.

However, the parallels that exists between the experiences of Jesus and Titus at Gennesareth are not limited to ‘catching men.’ The first part of Jesus’ statement is ‘Follow me’ and ‘Do not be afraid.’ When ones reads the passage from Josephus in which the Jews were ‘caught’ it is also recorded that the soldiers who did the ‘catching’ were told not to be afraid and indeed ‘followed’ someone. As the following excerpts show, the person being followed was Titus, who his troops to ‘not be afraid..’

*‘For you know very well that I go into danger first, and make the first attack upon the enemy. Do not you therefore desert me, but persuade yourselves that God will be assisting to my onset.’*⁵⁴

*And now Titus made his own horse march first against the enemy.*⁵⁵

*As soon as ever Titus had said this he leaped upon his horse and rode apace down to the lake; by which lake he marched and entered the city the first of them all, as did the others soon after him.*⁵⁶

Thus, Josephus pointed out three times that Titus was the first into battle. The Roman soldiers who would do the ‘fishing’ literally followed Titus. Creating another

⁵³ Josephus, War of the Jews 3,10,8

⁵⁴ War III X 2

⁵⁵ War III X 3

⁵⁶ War III X 5

conceptual parallel with Jesus who said to his disciples that if they would ‘follow me’ they would become ‘fishers of men.’

In fact, the NT passage above, in which Jesus asks his disciples to ‘Follow Me,’ and the passage from Josephus in which Titus asks his troops to ‘follow’ so that they can become ‘fishers of men’ have a number of other parallels.

Like Jesus, Titus has been sent by his father.

*So he sent away his son Titus to, Casarea, that he might bring the army that lay there to Scythopolis*⁵⁷

While it is hardly unusual to follow a leader into battle or to have been sent by one’s father, Titus, again like Jesus at Gennesareth, is in a sense beginning his ‘ministry’ there. He states that the battle is to be his ‘onset.’

*Do not you therefore desert me, but persuade yourselves that God will be assisting to my onset.*⁵⁸

The Greek word that Josephus uses here, ‘horme’ means exactly what the English word ‘onset’ does. That is, either an assault or a point of starting. From Titus’ perspective the moment can be seen as a starting point as it is his first battle in Galilee solely under his command.

To summarize, though there were thousands of other locations possible, both Jesus and Titus can be said to have had the ‘onset’ of their ‘ministries’ at Gennesareth in a manner that involved ‘fishing’ for men. Parallels that are unusual enough to at least permit the question of whether or not they were the product of circumstance. Moreover, these parallels must be viewed in conjunction with the historical parallels between Jesus and Titus.

Jesus predicted that a ‘Son of Man’ would come to Judea before the generation that crucified him passed away, encircle Jerusalem with a wall, and then destroy the temple, not leaving one stone atop another. Titus was the only individual in history that could be said to have fulfilled Jesus’ prophecies concerning the ‘Son of Man.’ He came to Jerusalem before the generation that crucified Christ passed away, encircled Jerusalem with a wall, and had the temple demolished.

The overlaps between Jesus’ prophecies and Titus’ accomplishments makes the ‘fishers of men’ parallel that occurs at the beginning of their ‘ministries’ more difficult to accept as a random quirk of literature. Is it plausible that the individual who fulfilled Jesus’ apocalyptic prophecies would have also, by chance, began his ‘ministry’ by having his ‘followers’ ‘fish’ for men at the same spot where Jesus said, ‘Follow me and become fishers of men?’ And, as we shall show, these are just the beginning of the uncanny

⁵⁷ *War III IX 7*

⁵⁸ *War III X 2*

parallels between the two 'son's of god' whose 'ministries' began in Galilee and ended in Jerusalem.