

The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah

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5 The Kingmakers

No one can accurately date all the books of the Old Testament. All we know for sure is that ancient writers produced works of poetry, prose, and law over many centuries based on oral traditions, which later editors used as sources to fashion the books of the Bible. There is agreement from experts in various disciplines, based on internal evidence from the texts and supported by archeological discoveries, that this process was begun in earnest during the period of enforced exile in Babylon. Scrolls from the library of the First Temple, which had managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem, were taken into Babylon by the exiled Jewish leadership.

Over time, the scribes structured the literature into a coherent and non-contradictory format, and the Law was officially recorded. This was the period in history when the importance of Jewish scribes was first established. And though the general consensus is that the exiles, far from home and without their beloved Temple, were united by the written word of Holy Scripture, the evidence of history suggests this was not the case.

ROOTS OF DIVISION

When the opportunity to return to Jerusalem was given them by Cyrus the Great, a great many Jews, perhaps even a majority, preferred to stay in Babylon. No doubt some had developed successful businesses and established themselves in the community, so were reluctant to leave. Others might have felt that it was simply too dangerous to go back to Palestine, considering its violent and unstable reputation. But the chief reason was that they did not relish the prospect of life under the strict ideological regime of Ezra and his supporters. Foreknowledge of the intended purge of the priesthood would have been reason enough for some priestly families to remain behind.

Ezra returned from Babylon with the recently overhauled sacred books, which now included lots of legalistic rules and regulations on animal sacrifices and cultic rites -- all supposedly dictated by God directly to Moses. Under the new government of the priestly reform faction, the rebuilt Temple, as God's dwelling place on earth, was made the absolute focus of national life. The Temple priesthood was the undisputed mediator between God and the rest of the population. Ezra did not advocate a return to the glory days, because he did not believe any had existed. On the contrary, he demanded that returnees, especially the priesthood, forget the past. Peace and prosperity would come solely through the disciplined practice of Temple ceremony and the strict prohibition of sexual contact outside the limits of the Law.

This period of Jewish history witnessed the beginnings of biblical fundamentalism, when the written word was held to be the literal expression of the unchanging, eternal, and absolute truth of God. A place for oral tradition existed only if it did not contradict the written Law. The priesthood developed into a hereditary ruling class that controlled both the religious and political aspects of society. The High Priest, which was also an inherited office, was essentially the head of state.

Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin had survived the wars with Assyria and Babylon - that is why the ten other tribes are known as ‘the lost tribes of Israel.’ But as most Israelites claimed to belong to the tribe of Judah, their religion became known as Judaism, or Judah-ism. “Jews” became the catch-all word for the Israelite nation, used indiscriminately by Gentiles. But the priesthood was not descended from the tribe of Judah.

Ezra was a scribe and a priest, but not all scribes were priests. Key sections of the Torah and other books were composed by scribes from the tribe of Judah. No one but descendants of Judah would have made such an elaborate effort to trace King David’s ancestral line back to Judah. And no one else would have written Jacob’s deathbed prophecy that the future salvation of Israel and the whole world will come from a descendant of Judah.

As far as the Palestinian priesthood was concerned, deliverance for the Israelites would come only with the blessing of the Temple authority. They had the final word. One can easily imagine, therefore, that most priests would have raised no objections to the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Its representation of Judah is far from flattering. The description of how he cemented the messianic lineage showed not only that he was a whoremonger, but he was duped by his own daughter-in-law into having an incestuous relationship with her. On the face of it, he was an unworthy ancestor for the tribe of Judah and an unsuitable role model for Israelites in general.

Famous stories of families in the messianic/patriarchal line that were insinuated into Holy Scripture have nothing to do with the Law of Moses, and have no connection whatsoever to the Temple. These narratives prove the existence of a parallel form of Judaism that rejected the supremacy of the Law and the Temple. Judaic scribes communicated this tradition using different techniques of plot, symbol, analogy, and metaphor which, for the most part, rendered their underlying message unintelligible to the fundamentalists.

Babylonian Jews who remained behind co-existed peacefully with the Zoroastrian Persians, and continued to thrive. Babylon became the world’s second-most important Jewish community outside Jerusalem. Babylonian Jews did not have the same enthusiasm for the Temple cult as their Palestinian counterparts, and did not regard the Law of Moses in the same absolutist terms. They emphasized other aspects of their religion. For example, the Book of Esther, which is indisputably a work of Babylonian scribes, is the only book in the Hebrew Bible that does not mention God, the Law, or the Temple. Esther, a Babylonian Jewess and the heroine of the story, conspires with her scribe ‘uncle’ to marry the world’s leading Gentile -- Xerxes, king of Persia. The Law was violated for a higher purpose. From her exalted position as Queen, Esther prevented the wholesale slaughter of Babylonian Jews planned by the king’s prime minister.

During the reign of Herod the Great, many Babylonian Jews came to live and study in Jerusalem. The most famous was Rabbi Hillel, known today as the spiritual father of modern Judaism, and regarded as one of the most important figures in Jewish history. After the Temple was destroyed, and the priesthood eradicated, the philosophy of the famous “School of Hillel” was adopted as mainstream rabbinic tradition. With the benefit of hindsight, Hillel’s liberal and inclusive interpretation of the Law was considered the most appropriate.

SEPARATE TRADITIONS

Ezra and the priestly leadership were backed financially and militarily by the Persian authorities, happy to use Palestine as a buffer zone on their western borders. After the Greeks conquered the Persian Empire, things began to slowly change. Whereas the Persians were content to leave the Jewish culture alone, the Greeks constantly sought opportunities to Hellenize them.

Among Palestinian Jews who benefited from trade and business in the Greek world, some had grown skeptical of the Jerusalem priesthood and the trappings of its religion. In these people, the Greeks found an ally to their cause. Wherever possible, sympathetic Jews were installed in positions of power. But change was slow, and eventually the Greeks grew impatient. Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.E.) attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion, and this triggered a huge popular backlash, recorded in the Books of I & II Maccabees.¹ The Greek rulers were overthrown, and an independent Jewish state was established that lasted for a hundred years.

Different religious sects emerged during this time whose precise origins are still ambiguous. The Pharisees, whose philosophy epitomized the legalism of Ezra, were one such group. The main source of information on the Pharisees comes from Josephus and the New Testament. But even though both are considered historically unreliable by modern scholars, Josephus' description of the Pharisees harmonizes with the gospel accounts. Josephus claimed to have been a Pharisee at one time, which might explain why he called them "accurate interpreters of the Law." In the New Testament, they are portrayed as sticklers for cultic minutiae, and obsessed with matters of bodily purity. From the evidence of later rabbinic writings, Pharisees also had many "extra" oral laws and customs not found in the written Torah, which were similarly oriented at purification through ritual observances. The Pharisaic movement represented the rise of fundamentalism, and their opposition to the rule of Herod the Great raised their stock among ordinary Palestinian Jews.

The other significant religious group was the Essenes. According to the available sources -- Josephus, Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls -- Essenes were comparable in many aspects to Pharisees. Personal purity was paramount and achieved through ceremonial practices. Both were regimented to a degree, but the Essenes were more idealistic, more revolutionary, than the Pharisees. They believed that the Essene community itself was the true Israel. Under the Essene umbrella, an influential school emerged with a prophetic and mystical bent that owed a great deal to Babylonian Judaism.

Josephus stated that during Herod's reign, Essenes were the king's advisors and his most favored religious faction. Herod was the natural enemy of the ruling priestly aristocracy represented by the Sadducees, and he was only tolerated by the Pharisees. Naturally, their popularity with Herod tainted Essenes in the eyes of some Palestinian Jews. And the antipathy toward them was heightened by the fact that their leader was a foreigner. Menahem was a Babylonian Jew.

MENAHM

Josephus recorded that Menahem was an Essene prophet who met Herod, who was still a schoolboy, and told him that he would be king of the Jews and rule for at least thirty years. When the prediction eventually came true, Herod accorded special privileges to the Essenes.

Herod was satisfied with these replies; and gave Menahem his hand, and

dismissed him with a friendly gesture; and from that time he continued to honor the Essenes.²

The Jerusalem Talmud refers to Menahem as a member of the king's court,³ and the Mishnah states that he was president of the Sanhedrin.⁴ The Essenes, under Menahem's leadership, were the establishment party. Consequently, they wielded considerable influence on Herod's policy of outreach to Diaspora Jews, who were encouraged to make financial contributions to the general reconstruction of Israel. Herod was known to give estates or manors to those who supported him, and the Essenes were surely rewarded with the Qumran estate. As they lived ascetically, and shunned the pursuit of personal wealth, it is difficult to imagine how else they could have owned such a strategically important piece of real estate. According to Josephus, Essenes specialized in prophecy, "in which they are seldom wrong." The focal point of all prophecy was the Messiah, and messianic prophecy was the obsession at Qumran.

Toward the end of the Second Temple period, common Israelites had come to believe that they could be united together into a powerful nation only by a king. They yearned nostalgically for the time when David ruled, when Israel was a strong nation feared and respected by its neighbors. Prophecies circulated that predicted the Messiah would come in the tradition of a Davidic warrior king. The emergence of Herod as king of the Jews, even if he was installed by the Romans, was taken as a sign by many that the time was close when Israel would be ready to accept a genuine king. Although Herod was considered an Arab imposter, he served to presage the real thing.

No doubt Herod the Great had his own views on the subject. But if he believed himself the Messiah, as some historians suspect, then he must have known that Palestinian Jews did not and never would. Herod rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem into arguably the world's most impressive construction outside of the pyramids, not to earn the respect and admiration of the locals, but to impress the much wealthier Diaspora Jews, whose population easily doubled that of Palestine.

Contemporary Jewish scholars calculated that seventy-six generations had passed since the Creation, and a prophecy in the Book of Enoch, a favored Essene text, foretold that the Messiah would deliver Israel in the seventy-seventh generation since the fall of the angels.⁵ The time had now arrived. By reputation, Menahem was a kingmaker, and the Essenes were accurate prophets, but the simplest way to answer the most important questions -- the when, where, and who of the Messiah -- was to have inside information. By adhering to the dispensational timetable, selecting the qualified personnel, and following the conception formula of holy births in the messianic lineage, Menahem's Essenes conspired to fulfill prophecy. The plan depended upon, and was rationalized by, Judaism's messianic code.

THE MYTH OF JUDAH

The story of Judah and Tamar is probably the most neglected chapter in the entire Book of Genesis. Bible commentators typically describe the content as sordid and objectionable. Martin Luther even questioned the validity of its inclusion in the Bible, as he also did with the Book of Esther. Modern skeptics say that it proves the Bible is just an amalgam of meaningless fabrications and legends. Two thousand years ago, an elite group of Essenes held a radically different view of Genesis 38. It held the secrets of the messianic code -- the explanation of how God initiated the sacred bloodline, and thus how the Messiah would come to the Jews. Based on the opening chapters of Matthew and

Luke, the same thing was understood by early Christians.

The legend of Judah is totally out of sync with the narrative flow of Genesis, and reads as a stark interruption into the story of Joseph. But even if it was inserted later, that does not explain why Judaic scribes composed such an apparently damning indictment of their own forefather. Here is the full text:

It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. Again she conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. She was in Chezib when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him.

Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also.

Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up" -- for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house. In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; and when Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.

When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot, for she had covered her face. He went over to her at the road side, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Will you give me a pledge, till you send it?" He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he could not find her. And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the harlot who was at Enaim by the wayside?" And they said, "No harlot has been here." So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, 'No harlot has been here.'" And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, lest we be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her."

About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry." And Judah said, "Bring

her out, and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Mark, I pray you, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not lie with her again.

When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, "This came out first." But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Zerah.

Genesis 38 replicated the pattern of previous Genesis myths. The introduction matches Judah's family with those of Adam and Noah. Genesis began with Adam, Eve, and their three sons -- Cain, Abel, and Seth. After the flood, only Noah, his wife, and their three sons -- Ham, Shem, and Japheth (and their wives) survived. Similarly, Judah, his wife, and three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah represented a new beginning in God's Providence. But whereas Adam and Noah had previously failed, and their descendants were cursed, Judah succeeded and his descendants were blessed. The fraternal dynamic that featured in the story of Adam's family, whereby the second-born son is preferred over the first, is also repeated. As Abel was accepted by God, so Perez, the younger brother, became the progenitor of the messianic line. As the offspring of Cain were banished, the Bible explains that the descendants of the first-born Zerah were cast into exile.

The triangular relationship between Judah-Tamar-Shelah prefigured a similar link between a priest (Zacharias), Mary, and Joseph. When Judah discovered Tamar's pregnancy, he called for her to be burnt, and not stoned to death, which was the prescribed punishment for adultery. Death by burning was reserved for daughters of the priesthood.⁶ This detail explains that that in the pre-Mosaic era, Judah and his sons were the original priests, because Tamar, who had married into Judah's family, was a daughter of the priesthood.

Priestly Father	Mother	Fiancé	First Son	Second Son
Judah	Tamar	Shelah	Zerah	Perez
Zacharias	Mary	Joseph	John	Jesus

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE

The scribes who wrote Genesis 38 understood that Tamar's deception and adultery were evidence of the divine hand. The reasons why derive from the Genesis story of Adam, Eve and the Serpent -- Judaism's version of how evil began. This book does not have space for an in-depth investigation into the relevance of the serpent in ancient civilizations. But the Sunday school lesson about a talking snake that tricked Eve into biting from an off-limits apple is for children only. The real story was for adults. The identity of the serpent in the Garden of Eden was referenced in the Book of Revelation.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Rev 12:9

In this case, the serpent was a fallen angel, Satan, known elsewhere as Lucifer, "bringer

of light.” The implication of the Latin “Lucifer” (*lux* = light, *ferro* = to bring) is one who teaches the truth. In the iconography of pagan religions and fertility cults in the Mediterranean region, serpents were central, and the pagan priesthood was known as ‘serpent priests.’ For Jewish anti-pagan polemicists, the serpent made the perfect symbol for Lucifer. Revelation drew on traditions from the Book of Enoch,⁷ and in Enochic Judaism the crime of the angels/priests was fornication. Within this context, Lucifer’s original position was priestly. He became the fallen angel after he seduced Eve.

The literature of the Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah, was compiled in the early Middle Ages, but the scribes claimed that the roots of the esoteric wisdom they represented went back far beyond the time of the First Temple, and that parts of the teaching originated from mystical visions of the Garden of Eden. The *Bahir* or *Sefer HaBahir* (“Book of the Brightness”) is a collection of midrashic verses on the first chapters of Genesis, attributed pseudigraphically to the first-century rabbinic sage Rabbi Nehunya. The *Bahir* states that the angel Sammael (Lucifer) conspired to destroy Adam and Eve because he feared God intended them to become the new masters of creation, and he would lose his status. Lucifer understood Eve was destined to be Adam’s mate, so he made a pact with other angels and sexually seduced her. Afterward, Eve realized that what she had done was wrong and feared for her future. She yearned for the purity she had lost, but which Adam still had. She had sexual relations with Adam so that they would share the same fate. Adam and Eve were intended to be a couple, but as they were not yet developed, their sexual relationship was premature.

The soul of the female comes from the Female, and the soul of the male comes from the Male. This is the reason why the Serpent followed Eve. He said, “Her soul comes from the north, and I will therefore quickly seduce her.” And how did he seduce her? He had intercourse with her.

Bahir 199

The wicked Sammael made a bond with all the host on high against his Master. This was because the Blessed Holy One said [regarding man] (*Genesis 1:26*), “And let him rule over the fish of the sea and the flying things of heaven.”[Sammael] said, “How can we cause him to sin and be exiled from before God?”

Bahir 200

Woe is to me. Now I will die and the Blessed Holy One will make another woman and give her to Adam. I will therefore cause him to eat with me. If we die, we will both die, and if we live, we will both live.”

Bahir 200

The archetype of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent was the blueprint for all future triangles. In the Protovangelium, Joseph compared his predicament to the Fall, “Is not the story of Adam repeated in me? For as at the hour of his giving thanks the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her, so hath it befallen me also.”⁸ Judaic scribes believed that when the direction of the Fall was reversed, its negative hereditary results were counteracted and a pure or messianic lineage was established. This explains sexual ‘transgressions’ by the matriarchs in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. A younger woman, who was intended for another man, always seduced an older authority figure.

Having declared Mary a perpetual virgin, the Church painted itself into a corner. So Mary atoned for Eve’s sin by dint of being a nonsexual being. By the same token, the celibate

Jesus restored Adam. This is how the Christian religion eradicated genealogy from the salvation ethic. Blood lineage might have been the obsession of ancient Jews, but the Christian fixation with the blood of Jesus, though wrapped in theological explanations of his crucifixion, betrays the same legacy.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Elisabeth was already pregnant with John the Baptist, but the messianic code required Zacharias have two sons. It is unlikely that the Essenes put all their eggs in one basket, but what is certain is that Mary was schooled. Luke described how Gabriel explained the program to her. The conversation between them reads exactly as one might expect between a young girl and an experienced mentor.

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.
Luke 1:30-38

Gabriel succinctly outlined to Mary the ancient scribal method to purify the messianic bloodline. She must be proactive to get a male child from a man who has special significance, but is not betrothed to her... The child will grow to be the Messiah. The man will father another son from his wife, and he will be the first-born.

Priest	Woman	Betrothed	First	Second
Serpent/Angel	Eve	Adam	Cain	Abel
Judah	Tamar	Shelah	Zerah	Perez
Zacharias	Mary	Joseph	John	Jesus

The scheme was audacious, but necessary to fulfill prophecy. So-called wise men who came to visit the infant Jesus already knew the time and place. They had no need of miraculous signs in the night sky. As co-conspirators in facilitating Jesus’ conception, they already knew where to go.

THE WISE MEN

Matthew’s story of the wise men is one of the most-loved and best-known elements of Jesus’ nativity. To make sense of the narrative, however, the wise men need to be identified. They are described as “Magi,” plural of “Magus,” which was originally a term for an ancient Mesopotamian shaman, and was used later to mean a Zoroastrian priest. Matthew was a Jew, writing for a Jewish readership. He would hardly bracket the Gentile priesthood with the newborn king of the Jews. Christian apologists explain that Zoroastrian prophecy predicted a worldwide savior figure. Matthew included Magi in his account to show that Jesus’ mission was targeted on the whole world, and not Jews alone.

Irrespective of Zoroastrian beliefs, the overwhelming evidence of Matthew's gospel is that Jesus did not have an inclusive philosophy:

“And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”
Matt 5:47

"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them."
Matt 6:7-8

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things.”
Matt 6:31-32

“I have come only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel;”
Matt 15:24

"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
Matt 10:6-7

If the Magi were Persian or any nationality other than Jewish, they were wasting their time. Matthew featured them in the storyline because they were Jewish priests who specialized in prophecy. The reference to a star, which supposedly hovered above Jesus' birth place, did not imply that the Magi were Zoroastrian astrologers. Astrology and astronomical phenomena were the fascination of all peoples in the ancient world, especially Jews. Sun, moon, and stars were constant themes in Jewish prophetic tradition. Matthew's star simply indicated that the time and place of Jesus' birth was in accordance with heaven's timetable.

Zoroastrians were renowned for their refined angelology, a trait they shared with Essenes. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E. -- 50 C.E.), the Jewish philosopher-historian, compared the Essenes to Indian Gymnosophists and to Persian Magi.⁹ He appears to have held Essenes in high regard.

Myriads of his disciples has the lawgiver (Moses) trained for the life of fellowship. These people are called Essenes.¹⁰

Reverence for Moses was a characteristic of Josephus' Essenes and is also apparent in the Dead Sea Scrolls literature. The Greek geographer and historian, Strabo (c. 63 B.C.E. -- 23 C.E.), wrote of the Persian Magi that, “Moses was such a person as these.”¹¹ Obviously, a tradition existed during the first century that identified Moses and his most dedicated Essene followers with Magi. Matthew used the word “Magi” to make a clear distinction that these priestly visitors were Essenes. Coming from the “East,” signified that they were Babylonian Jews.

PAYMENT FOR THE CHILD

The Magi, we are told, left gifts of “gold, frankincense and myrrh.” It appears that their mission was just to drop off some valuables. Formalities over, they departed the scene, satisfied with only a glimpse of the savior baby, and never surfaced again. These Essene

priests knew Herod's plan to kill the child, but put their own safety first. Jesus was abandoned, not adopted by them. They brought a payment. This could have been for one or several of the following reasons:

- 1) To Mary for having the child
- 2) To Joseph for not going public on Mary's extra-marital conception
- 3) For the child's upbringing
- 4) To buy the child.

According to Josephus, certain Essenes adopted children of special merit, and raised them in the Essene way of life. In the gospel portraits, although Jesus is detached from his family, he does not appear to have been an orphan. Evidently, Mary raised him, and he was recognized as her son.

Joseph did not divorce Mary after she had been impregnated by another man. This means either he was a saint, or he was well compensated. Throughout the entire ordeal, Joseph took instructions from "the angel of the Lord," who is already identified as a priest. As with Elkanah, who handed over Samuel to Eli the priest, Joseph would have had few objections to handing over a child that was not his own. Luke recounted an incident when the twelve years old Jesus went missing after a trip to Jerusalem. His "parents" waited three days before searching for him. Most probably, as the child of another man, Jesus was resented by Joseph. Though he was canonized by the Church, Joseph is never mentioned by Jesus.

The Essenes did not take Jesus. Presumably, Herod's discovery of their plot meant it was too dangerous for them. For the protection of the messianic child, Joseph and Mary were instructed to go to 'Egypt.' The payment they received would take care of expenses.

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

Herod reportedly called a meeting of priests and scribes to ascertain the Messiah's birthplace, so that he might worship the newborn king in person. But the prophecy of Bethlehem was well known, and did not warrant a commission of inquiry. Everyone knew the only future king of the Jews that Herod wanted to meet was one of his own sons. He rebuilt the Temple into the world's foremost religious shrine not out of devotion, but to ingratiate himself with the worldwide Jewish population, and thus ensure a messianic status for his bloodline. Herod had big plans, and much depended on his surviving sons to carry on his unfinished work.

In his final years, Herod fell horribly sick, and factional strife broke out in his family over the succession. No doubt he was vulnerable, susceptible to manipulation. People with scores to settle took advantage of the situation. Enemies of Menahem and the Essenes, revealed the treason unfolding at Qumran. Like most dictators, Herod suspected those in his close circle of plotting against him. He had notoriously ordered the murder of two of his sons, Aristobolus and Antipater, in 7 and 4 B.C.E. because he believed they had joined forces with their mother in a conspiracy against him. So the news only confirmed what he was already thinking. The traitors who supported an alternative royal lineage were his Essene advisors.

A weakening, paranoid Herod lashed out violently. He ordered the killing of all male children, two years of age and younger, in the Bethlehem area. This mass murder was later branded the "Massacre of the Infants," for which Herod is mostly known today.

Historians, however, consider this episode to be pure invention. Slaughter on such a scale could not have occurred in Bethlehem at this time, without at least some corroborative evidence surviving. Even Josephus, who delighted in listing Herod's atrocities, failed to include this one, which would have been the biggest indictment of them all.

The general consensus is that this story was a combination of a famous Jewish legend, and the well-known murder of his sons, which inspired the comment that "he would rather be Herod's pig, than his son" from the Roman Emperor Augustus. The large-scale infanticide theme was lifted from the story of Moses. The Pharaoh's attempted to kill Moses at birth by sentencing to death all Hebrew male children. This served Matthew's theological purpose of likening Jesus to Moses. But in presenting his gospel, Matthew did not invent elaborate falsehoods. He put theological spin onto actual events and explained them in the language of his school.

Bethlehem was cited simply because prophecy required that the Davidic king was born there. It was not the location of Jesus' birth; neither was it attacked by Herod's soldiers. Nevertheless, young children kept by Essenes, were sought after and murdered.

Archeological evidence proves that the settlement at Qumran was attacked and destroyed by fire between 8-4 B.C.E.,¹² the period when John and Jesus were born. Graves for women and children discovered in the Qumran cemetery, all date in the period shortly before and after the turn of the first-century C.E.¹³ The Qumran Essenes are presumed to have been a strictly all-male adult society, which may or may not have been true at one time, but the existence of the graves confirms that a community of women and children also lived there. Child adoptees were not raised in desert caves. Children were placed in an Essene community orphanage, where women would take care of them. Herod believed that if he could destroy the orphanage and kill the children, he would remove any future threat posed by a messianic child-king harbored there. Luke's statement that John the Baptist was "in the wilderness" is generally taken to mean he was adopted. "In the wilderness" is a phrase used repeatedly in the Dead Sea Scrolls to describe the Qumran location.

In the Protovangelium, Herod's men were instructed to kill the infant John the Baptist, so Elisabeth hid him in the mountains. There was no mention of any attempt to kill Jesus. The author was unaware of Matthew's version of events, and knew this story from the same Baptist source that claimed Zacharias was murdered for protecting John. No Christian writer would knowingly transfer glory away from Jesus. Regardless who the architects of Zacharias' murder were, they would have also targeted his children. Zacharias' sons escaped the attack on Qumran. Later, both sets of their disciples would claim 'credit' for the event.

THE KING-BREAKERS

No information exists on the Essenes prior to the time of Herod the Great. Possibly, they were a breakaway faction of Pharisees, who rose to prominence during the Herodian era. But one thing was certain; the Essenes had plenty of enemies. Many Palestinian Jews resented the excessive influence of foreign Babylonians and took exception to their exalted status in Herod's administration. Above all, Palestinian Pharisees were indignant. They wanted power. Most emphatically, they wanted to wrest control of the Sanhedrin from the outsider faction.

The Koran's statement that "Thou wast not present with them when they threw their pens

to know which of them should be the guardian of Mary, nor wast thou present with them when they quarreled thereupon,” reveals that certain people were unhappy with the scheme to create a messianic child. The dissenters leaked word of the plot to Herod.

By this time, Essenes had insinuated themselves into positions of authority in Herod’s government, which included sections of the military. So when news of the Essene treachery reached Herod, his response was violent but not reckless. As a dying man with many enemies, he did not want to trigger an all-out civil war. As it was a soft target, he struck the orphanage, and Essene leaders were purged from office.

Herod died in 4 B.C.E., shortly after the attack on Qumran, and revolts broke out in various parts of the country. Josephus wrote that people who had formerly been close to Herod were directing the uprising.¹⁴ Menahem and the Essenes were not named, but this was likely to maintain the consistency of his description of them as pacifists. The turmoil provided their Palestinian opponents with further opportunities for revenge. Josephus alluded to an exclusion of Essenes from certain parts of Temple life, and the rabbinic literature makes a specific reference to an Essene expulsion from Jerusalem during Menahem’s time.¹⁵ According to the Mishnah, Menahem was exiled or he resigned for reasons unspecified. A list of religious leaders in pairs was given until the early first century C.E:

Yose b. Yoezer says not to lay on hands. Yose b Yohanan says to lay on hands
Joshua b Perahyah says not to lay on hands. Nittai the Arbelite says to lay on
hands Judah b Tabbai says not to lay on hands. Simeon b Shatah says to lay on
hands Shemayah says to lay on hands. Abtalyon says not to lay on hands Hillel
and Menachem did not differ. Menachem departed, Shammai entered Shammai
says not to lay on hands. Hillel says to lay on hands

The first named were patriarchs, and the second to them were heads of the court.¹⁶

The “heads of the court” were presidents of the Sanhedrin, which proved the extent of Menahem’s power. This was Menahem from the time of Herod of the Great, as he was paired with the famous Pharisee Hillel, who spent the last forty years of his life in Jerusalem, 30 B.C.E. -- 10 C.E. Especially noteworthy, is that the “patriarch” was always at odds with the “head of the court,” except in the case of Hillel and Menahem, who “did not differ.” Both men shared the common bond of Babylonian origin. Hillel is acknowledged to have authored the “golden rule,” which is thought to have influenced Jesus’ teaching. But Menahem, rather than Hillel, was most probably the source of Jesus’ inspiration.

When Menahem “departed,” Shammai (50 B.C.E. -- 30 C.E.) replaced him. Rabbinic tradition described Shammai as a contemporary rival of Hillel, in that his school of thought was far more legalistic and conservative. Shammai was a Palestinian Pharisee. The Talmudic writings show his followers to have been consistently preoccupied with matters of purity and ritual cleanliness. During Jesus’ public life, and until the destruction of Jerusalem, the School of Shammai was dominant in Palestine.

The Babylonian Talmud lionized Hillel, but the Jerusalem Talmud of the Palestinians was much less effusive. Hillel was unlikely to have forced out Menahem. That would have been the work of Shammai’s Palestinian faction.

The Jerusalem Talmud also referred to Menahem’s exile. It quoted the line from the

Mishnah, “Menahem departed,” and asked, “Where did he go?” The response is exceptionally illuminating.

Some say he went from one way of behaving to another
And some say he turned round
and left;

He and eighty pairs of Torah scholars clad in golden armor,
Whose faces were painted black as pots

Because they told them

“Write on a bull’s horns that you have no part in the God of Israel.”¹⁷

Menahem was banished along with a hundred and sixty fellow Essenes. They were warriors, not only religious scholars. If Menahem led an exclusive military unit or private army, it could not have been part of the mainstream Essene movement as it is generally understood. The reason why the Essenes were exiled is explained in the line of excommunication -- “Write on a bull’s horns you have no part in the God of Israel.”

“Bull” was the age-old Jewish symbol for the false god, reminiscent of Baal, and the golden calf worshipped by unfaithful Israelites in the time of Moses. Bulls were sacred to many pagan contemporaries, especially in the military dominated cult of Mithraism. Inevitably, Jews used the word “bull” to denote falsehood, which is also its meaning in modern vernacular.

“Horn,” as previously mentioned, was a common symbol for fertility, lineage, and bloodline. Greek mythology had the “horn of plenty,” and animal horns were connected with sex and fecundity in many cultures. Zacharias described the messianic bloodline as a “horn of salvation,” in reference to Jesus. But when “bull” is used with “horn,” the meaning is the direct opposite. “Bull’s horns” signified a false bloodline or ‘satanic lineage.’ The Palestinian Pharisees knew of the plan to produce a Messiah child, and condemned Menahem’s Essenes because of it. They had cynically manipulated tradition to serve blasphemous ends. In doing so, they had created a ‘devil’ child.

The gospels explain that scribes were sent from Jerusalem to explain to people that Jesus “is possessed by Beelzebub, by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”¹⁸ Denouncing the circumstances of his birth, Palestinian scribes used the Law of Moses to denounce Jesus as ‘son of Satan.’

The phrase, “No part in the God of Israel” meant that Menahem’s Essenes were expelled from the Temple and mainstream Jewish society. Many went to the Qumran estate. Military training continued there, and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the membership harbored military ambitions and was preparing for battle. The Essene scribes had contempt for the Temple leadership, and more significantly, they were consumed with messianic expectation.

PROPHECY

Prophecy is one of the most controversial aspects of religion. One of the main problems is that many prophecies were recorded after, and not before, events that they predicted. In the world’s monotheistic faiths, believers tend to regard events in the formation of their religion as the enactment of God’s will. For example, Christians understand that

everything that occurred in Jesus' life -- recruited fishermen, taught in parables, rejected by Jews, and crucified by Romans -- followed the script of a divine plan, based simply on the fact that it happened. Jews and Moslems basically follow the same concept.

Prophecy in Judaism was a two edged sword. If you do well, you will be blessed. If you do badly, you will be cursed. The implication being that humans have responsibility in the process of fulfilling the divine will. This is generally overlooked. But the realization of a prophecy is not a given. *X* will only happen if people do *Y*, otherwise *X* will not happen.

Menahem did not wait for prophecy to happen. He *made* it happen. The same was true for Jesus. They shared the same philosophy. For example, because the public were slow to catch on to his core message, "the kingdom of God is at hand," Jesus sat on a donkey and rode into Jerusalem. This event was unlikely to have been fabricated as it was included in all four gospels. But he rode on a donkey to substantiate a famous messianic prediction that would have been recognized by onlookers;

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; Triumphant and victorious is he, Humble and riding on a donkey.
Zech 9:9

The earlier prophecy had created the event. Jesus made the conscious decision to actualize it, solely that people might identify him. This reflected the narrow parameters to which people restricted God, but Jesus had to relate to them on their own terms. Ultimately, he did not succeed. They did not recognize him as king. Probably, some people are still waiting for that prophecy to come true. But the time of donkeys has long passed. It was not fulfilled because, even though Jesus did his bit, he could not do it for others. The dilemma for Jesus was that his intention was not to be a spiritual teacher. That was the task of the Elijah figure, who would prepare the population to receive their king. The spotlight now returns to John the Baptist.