The Dead Sea Scrolls:

Part III

Essenes and the Early Jesus Movement
Was the Gospel of Mark one of the Scrolls?

Mark 6: 52-53 / Matthew 14:34:
“but their hearts were hardened. And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennessaret, and moored to the shore. And when . . .

-- Greek fragment from Cave 7
Did Cave 7 – the Greek texts – have books from the New Testament?

- Is the fragment Mark 5: 52-53 or a variant of an Enoch text?
- Is 7Q19 from a commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans? 35 letters in 6 lines, but reversed (a print) – the 2nd largest fragment.
- Are 7Q4 & 5 from I Timothy 3:16 – 4:13? Seven lines of three letters each from the top right hand side of the page – i.e., just the ending of words.
The Pentecostal Experience Foretold?

“. . . The heavens and the earth will listen to His Messiah . . . Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power . . . He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the bent . . . And the Lord (Adonai) will accomplish glorious things which have never been accomplished . . . For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor. . . .”        Dead Sea Scroll 4Q521
Who were the Essenes?

• A dissident group of “priests and a few good men” who broke with the Temple hierarchy during the Maccabean reign, *circa* 135 B.C.
• They retreated to the desert to “prepare the Way of the Lord” for the expected apocalypse.
• They had small communities of believers all across Israel and Judea with an open table for their brethren.
• They remained a powerful opposition force to the priestly hierarchy until their demise in 68 A.D.
Parallels Between the Essenes and Early Jesus Movement

- Led by a/the Teacher of Righteousness,
- a Bursar, who held the common purse,
- A legislative council of 12 “men of Israel,”
- And 3 “Pillars of the community.”

- Practiced an extreme form of piety
- Rejected Wealth
- Held their goods in a common purse.
- Married to procreate, but withdrew for long periods of study.
- Rejected Divorce.
The “Holy Ones” of the Scrolls and the early Jesus Movement

• Felt that they had cracked the secret “code” of this plan.
• Were convinced that the end time events had already begun.
• Felt they had a special role in bringing about the final apocalypse.
• Called themselves “the sons of light,” the “Way,” the “brethren,” the “Poor,” and the “Poor in Spirit.”
• Thought God had revealed His plan for a Heavenly kingdom through scriptures.
Parallels in Beliefs Between the Jesus Movement and the Essenes

- Worshipped in separate assemblies.
- Celebrated a ritual communal meal.
- Saw themselves as part of a New Covenant with God.
- Opposed the Temple hierarchy.

- Believed in both the Spirit of God and a human spiritual essence.
- Believed in a final resurrection of both spirit and body.
- Do not appear to have offered animal sacrifices.
- Interpreted OT texts to fit current events (Pesher)
Parallels Between Paul and the Scrolls

• 1. Cor. 7: 29: “Let those who have wives live as if they had none” – i.e., celibacy in marriage.
• 1 Cor. 11: 27: “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.”
• Romans 1: 17 and Gal. 3: 11: “as it is written: ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”
• 1 Timothy 3:17: The qualifications of a Christian bishop parallel those of an Essene Master.
Essenes in the Gospels?

- Mark 14: 12-16: Look for a man carrying a jug of water --the Upper Room may have been an Essene Safe House.
- Luke 16: 1-8: the punch line to the parable of the Dishonest Steward: “the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light.”
- Mark 10: 2-12 / Matthew 19: 1-9: Jesus on divorce.
The “Sons of Light” in Acts?

• Acts 1: 21-26: the selection of a 12th disciple.
• Paul in Galatians 2: 9: “James and Cephas and John . . . [the] pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised, only they would have us remember the poor.
• Acts 6: 7: And the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.
Marked Differences Between the Essenes and the Early Brethren

- The Brethren were a collection of peasant Galileans, sinners, and marginal Jews.
- Women were active in the movement.
- They had an “open table” and little concern for traditional purity rituals.

- The Essenes were a monastic, super pious, and largely aristocratic group.
- Their focus on purity rituals would have prevented them from eating meals with the brethren.
How Does Acts Handle the Differences?

Acts 6: 1-6: Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in numbers, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. . . Pick out . . . seven men . . . whom we may appoint to this duty.”

What was the controversy: the distribution of resources or separating the tables of the Greeks?
The Attraction: Why did the Jesus Movement allow itself to be taken over by the Essenes?

- The Essenes were an established, widely recognized, and revered group of holy men.
- They were the swing vote on the Sanhedrin.
- This gave the disciples both political protection and religious cover.
- While the Galileans were largely without resources, the Essenes owned considerable property in Jerusalem.
- Jesus’ brother James the Just appears to have been the leader of the Jerusalem Essenes.
Two Factions of Early Brethren?

The Greeks
- The Disciples plus foreign born Jews, women, and Gentile proselytes.
- “John’s baptism” for forgiveness of sin.
- Communion -- a ritual meal with an open table.
- Spread the Way to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel.”

The Party of Circumcision
- A largely monastic sect of pious Jews who remained in Jerusalem.
- Maintained strict piety and purity rituals.
- Passover meals -- a closed table for pious Jews only.
- Led by James the Just – (“the men from James”).
Paul Persecutes the Way

• Acts 9: 1-25: Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, where he was to arrest “any belonging to the Way, men or women.”

• Paul teaches in the “synagogues” at Damascus that Jesus is a/the “Son of God” and “the Christ.”

• Paul escapes by being lowered in a basket.

• 2 Cor. 11: 32-33: Paul escaped at “Damascus” from King Aretas by being lowered in a basket.

• Galatians 1: 17: “[After conversion] I went away into Arabia and again I returned to Damascus.”
Damascus is Hebrew for “the cup of blood,”
it’s not in Syria, but the Arabian desert.
Evidence that Qumran is in “Damascus”

• It is the headquarters of the “Brethren,” the “Poor,” and the “sons of light” who called their movement the “Way.”

• Only three 1st Century synagogues have been found in Judea – one was at Qumran and another at Massada, both part of “Damascus.”

• Basket lifts were used to go up and down from the cliffs (the walls) to the caves and ground below.

• Nabatea, where Aretas was king until 42 A.D., surrounds the Eastern side of the Dead Sea
Who was “Stephen, the first martyr of the Way?”

- Acts 6: 5: As “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” Stephen was an early leader who was specially appointed to minister to the Greeks once the “priests” had joined the Movement.

- Acts 7:53. His messianic beliefs: “And they killed those who announced before hand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have betrayed and murdered.”

- Acts 7:55: “Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”
Was “Stephen” Really a “Greek” or was he an Essene?

- Stephen makes 3 obvious errors in his recitation of Jewish history that show lack of scholarship.
- But the Scrolls show that an apparent mistake in his recitation of Jewish history – i.e., 75 Jews in the family of Joseph that moved to Egypt (Acts 7: 14) vs. 70 in Gen 46: 27; Ex 1: 5; and Deut 10: 22 – was an error in the Greek, not the Hebrew text!
- “Stephen” was the first Christian martyr in an apparently unauthorized stoning: “And Paul was consenting to his death (Acts 8: 1).”
- In the Book of Recognitions of the Jewish brethren, Jesus’ brother James was seriously injured in an assassination attempt at the Temple by the “enemy”.
Was Paul the “Enemy” in Recognitions (the “Acts” of the Jewish Brethren)

In Recognitions, an “Enemy (whom an margin note says was “Saul”)” forced the followers of the Way to flee, first to Jericho, and then to “Damascus.” Some of these brethren were beaten by the “Enemy,” who wielded a firebrand he took from the altar. The “Enemy” set out with letters from the high priest to arrest Peter and the other followers of the Way in “Damascus.”
The Special Code of the Scrolls

Are the coded references in the scrolls to historical characters from the 2
nd century B.C., apocalyptic figures, or living (i.e., 1
st Century) figures?

– A/the Teacher of Righteousness – a/the leader of the “sons of light.”

– The Evil Priest who makes war on the sons of light and kills a/the Teacher of Righteousness.

– The Liar / Lying Tongue – one of the Way who leads members astray with his deviant beliefs.
Was Paul “The Liar / Lying Tongue?”

- After a prolonged defense of salvation by acts (not faith alone), the Letter of James (3: 6-8) concludes: “And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is a world of wickedness among our members, staining the whole body . . . Set on fire by hell . . . But no man can tame the tongue . . . it/he is a restless evil full of deadly poison.”

- Paul feels compelled to continuously defend himself: “I am not lying (Romans 9: 1 and I Timothy 2: 7);” “God knows I speak the truth (II Cor. 11: 31);” and “Before God I do not lie (Gal. 1: 20).”
James the Just (or James the Righteous)

- Described by Paul (Gal 2: 3) as one of the three “pillars” of the early movement, James remained in Jerusalem as head of the Movement.
- By Acts 15 James seems to be in charge of the Jerusalem conference on circumcision, where he issued his directive to the Gentiles to obey the Noahide laws of kosher diet.
- Acts 21: 17-26: Is James the leader of the Nazarites or the pious Nazorites (Numbers 6: 2)?
Three Versions of the Family Tree of Jesus

1. James as Full Brother of Jesus

Joseph \( m. \) Mary

Jesus James Joseph Simon Jude Salome Mary

2. James as Half Brother of Jesus

Previous Wife \( m. \) Joseph \( m. \) Mary

James Joseph Simon Jude Salome Mary Jesus

3. James as Cousin of Jesus

Joseph \( m. \) Mary

Clopas \( m. \) Mary of Clopas

Jesus James Joseph Simon Jude Salome Mary
James and the Party of Circumcision oppose Paul’s “Christianoi”

- Galatians 2: 1-10: Because of the “false brethren,” Paul is forbidden to preach to Jewish audiences. As the self-appointed “apostle to the Gentiles,” he is required to “remember the Poor.”

- Galatians 2: 12: “I opposed Cephas (Peter) to his face . . . for before certain men from James came he ate with Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back, fearing the circumcision party.”

- Titus 1: 10-16: “For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party; they must be silenced . . . They are detestable. . . .”
James in Other Sources: Was he a/the Righteous Teacher of the Essenes?

• His knees were “calloused like a camel’s” from daily worship sessions at the Temple, where he “offered the prayers of the people.”

• He seemed to have served as a sort of counter-cultural high priest.

• Executed by Annas II in 62 A.D. – pushed from the pinnacle of the Temple -- an action that Josephus blamed for the loss of God’s favor.

• The Pharisees were so outraged they sent petitions to have Annas II removed from his position.
The 5 Signs of the End Times

1. A/the Righteous Teacher would be destroyed by the Wicked Priest (scrolls refer to broken bones).
2. “The cup of the Lord’s vengeance” would come around to the Wicked Priest.
3. Israel would be desolated by foreign armies.
4. The riches of the last priests of Jerusalem would be delivered up to the foreign armies.
5. The “sons of light” would destroy the Gentiles in a great battle when the heavenly forces of God came to their rescue.
# Two Views of the End Time Events circa 66 A.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jewish / Essene</th>
<th>“Christianoi”</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James the Just had been executed by Annas II;</td>
<td>Peter (and Paul) had been executed by Nero;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annas II was killed in the Temple by “sinners;”</td>
<td>Nero was forced to commit suicide;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Romans had destroyed Biblical Israel (Galilee);</td>
<td>Galilee had been destroyed by the Romans;</td>
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<tr>
<td>The riches of the Priests had been used as a bribe;</td>
<td>Priestly riches had been used as a bribe;</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Roman attack had stalled</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Poor attacked the Legion</td>
<td>“Christianoi” set Rome on fire</td>
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The End Times in the Gospels

• The Temptation Story from Q (Matt. 4: 1-11 / Luke 4: 1-13) deals with the God’s failure to rescue the Righteous who are pushed from the pinnacle of the Temple or who (Peter and Paul) refuse to bow down to the Great Satan (Nero).

• Mark 13: 5-37 (the Little Apocalypse): “. . . For you shall be delivered up to councils, beaten in the synagogues, and brought before rulers and kings for my sake . . . . But when you shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet . . . Then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains . . . For false messiahs and prophets shall arise and show signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.”
The Jewish “Christians” After James

• Led by Simeon, Jesus’ cousin (the son of Clopas), they fled from Jerusalem and escaped to Pella in the hills of Gideon to await the apocalypse.

• Because they had not taken sides, after the war they were ostracized by both Jews and Gentiles.

• Calling themselves “The Poor (Ebionites), they were led by Jesus’ family for 300+ years before being branded as heretics and wiped out.

• Although they claimed a Davidic heritage, they believed in the Adoptionist view of the divine inspiration behind Jesus as a “son of God.”
Was there a Priestly Disciple Named “John?”

- Galatians 2: Paul rails against Peter, James, and John, the so-called “pillars of the community."
- Papias: “I inquired as to the words of the elders, what Andrew or Peter, or Philip or Thomas, or James or John or Matthew said, and what Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord’s disciple said . . . .”
- The gospel and letters of John were written by “John the Elder,” who is also identified as “John the Priest” or “John the Divine in early texts.
Was John Zebedee Really the Beloved Disciple Who Wrote the Gospel?

• In John 21: 2 the Beloved Disciple is in the boat with Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the “sons of Zebedee” and two others.
• In John 21: 24 the Beloved Disciple is apparently the last of the disciples to die and the only one to die a natural death.
• In Mark 10: 35-40 Jesus tells John Zebedee, “the cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized . . . .”
• Legend says that John Zebedee was beheaded in Rome by Nero about 64 A.D.
Was an Essene the Beloved Disciple who wrote the gospel of John?

- Although his native language was Aramaic, he struggled to write his gospel in biblical Greek – not the scholarly Greek of Luke, Paul, or Matthew.
- The result is short, choppy sentences with lots of repetition that depict both the eloquence of his story and his personal struggle to write it.
- Much of his imagery comes either from the Aramaic text of the Old Testament (“In the beginning was the Word. . . .”) or the Manual of Discipline of the Essenes, which novitiates were required to memorize in both Greek and Aramaic.
- His theology and “I am” pronouncements align better with the scrolls and mystic Judaism than Christian orthodoxy.
Theories / Speculation

• John the Elder / John the “Priest” was an aristocratic Judean (known by the high priest; at the foot of the cross, etc.) who had been trained as an Essene and been the host of the Final Meal.

• That is why his gospel focuses almost exclusively on the events in Jerusalem, not Galilee.

• Although he played a major role in the formation of the Way, he was largely written out of Acts by Luke because he so forcefully opposed Paul.

• He may have been the “John” who at first was the “minister” to Paul on Cyprus (Acts 13: 5), but was so horrified by what he saw that he left the group on the mainland and rushed back to Jerusalem to denounce Paul and his “gospel.”