

JESUS, THE PROPHET AND MESSIAH

BY W.M. WEBER

THE Israelites had prophets ever since they became a nation. But they lost them after the third war with the Romans. That happened in the year 135 A. D. From that time on, the Pharisees became the religious guides of the Jews.

The Jewish followers of Jesus remained Jews. They had their synagogues, observed the Sabbath and all the Jewish feasts, obeyed the law of Moses, but did not accept the rules of the Pharisees.

Unfortunately, they stood, thanks to Paul, between the pharisaic Jews and the Gentile Christians and were bound to be crushed sooner or later by the Gentiles and the Pharisees. The last synagogue of the faithful followers of Jesus was destroyed in the seventh century. Gentile Christians annihilated them. That was the final fulfillment of the warning of Jesus:

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs.
Neither cast pearls before the swine.
Lest haply they trample them under their feet
and turn and rend you. Matth. vi. 6 and 10, 5-7 a. s. f.

If any one dares to learn the truth about Jesus, he has to study the Four Gospels. For they contain what has come down to us and can explain why Jesus was and ought to be still the Prophet and Messiah of his nation as well as all others who understand him and believe in him.

It is generally supposed that Jesus was born in Palestine, grew up there, became a disciple of John the Baptist, started on his own mission after he had been baptized by his teacher and had heard with all that were present the voice of God that proclaimed from heaven: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Matth. iii. 17; Mark i. 11; Luke iii. 21 f. and John i. 32.

According to certain statements, Jesus was about 30 years old when he became a prophet and the Messiah. He died within a year after his baptism. That is at least the report of the Synoptic Gospels.

The age of 30 years can hardly be accepted. For while the gift of prophecy is based indeed upon an inborn, clear understanding and judgment, it can be developed properly alone by long and manifold experience. Therefore all great prophets have been old men. Even John Milton refers to that fact in his *Il Penseroso*. There were read:

And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every star that heaven doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew,
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.

That Jesus is supposed to have been only 30 years old when he ended his career on earth, has come from the Gentile Christians. They believed Jesus was the natural Son of God, and they had always been convinced that most of the Olympian Sons of Zeus appeared to be about 30 years old when they mingled with men and women on earth.

The Jews were not afflicted with such a superstition. For they had been taught by all their prophets that God and His Angels regarded sexual intercourse with daughters of men as the greatest and never forgiven sin of heavenly beings.

There was however one Angel, or according to other reports a number of Angels, whose duty was to watch the people on earth. Therefore he was called the Watcher. His name is Azâzêl. He fell in love with beautiful daughters of men and descended from heaven to live on earth with such women. It was their offspring that brought all sin and wickedness into the world and caused the Deluge.

There are quite a number of additions to this story in the *Book of Enoch*. The oldest part tells us that the faithful Angels reported Azâzêl to God. The latter had all the women and their wicked descendants drowned in the Flood. Azâzêl however was placed in Dudâêl and covered with darkness. But on the great day of Judgment he shall be cast into the fire.

The Book of Enoch was very popular during the age of Jesus. He himself has quoted the following words from it: "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as Angels in heaven." (Matth. xxii, 30; Mark xii, 25; Luke xx, 35 f.) See Book of Enoch, Sect. II, 51, 4.

The editor of this Book, published by the Clarendon Press at Oxford, tells us in the General Introduction, page I: "All the writers of the New Testament were familiar with the Book of Enoch . . . With the earlier Fathers and Apologists it had all the weight of a canonical book, but towards the beginning of the fourth century, it began to be discredited, and finally fell under the ban of that Church."

There is no room at all for doubting that the Jews at the time of Jesus could not believe in any natural son of God. That was and remained exclusively a Gentile idea and that a most repulsive one.

But also that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and that the voice of God was heard by all who were present, is more than doubtful. The Jews believed indeed in the voice of God that spoke sometimes from heaven to one or more of His worshippers.

D. August Wünsche, *Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Evangelien aus Talmud and Midrasch*, Göttingen 1878, has thrown light upon the voice from heaven in which the Jews believed. The Pharisees called it *Bath kol*, as the doctor explains page 22 f.

But those words from heaven were heard only at important occasions. Peter tells us of only a single voice from heaven, that was addressed to Jesus shortly before his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He writes in his Epistle I, 6-8: "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory: This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. And the voice we heard out of the heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount."

That was the only voice from heaven of which Peter, James and his brother John knew. It is confirmed by Matth. xvii, 1-8 as well as by the other two synoptic Gospels. It happened just as Jesus was to start on his journey to the Temple, perhaps two weeks before his death on the cross. This act of God had a double purpose. It was to encourage Jesus and, at the same time, to convince his three companions, who would have to continue his work on earth,

that their master was the promised Messiah. There is certainly no room in the public life of Jesus for two such appearances of God.

Matth. xi. 2-6 presents a question of John the Baptist and the answer of Jesus. Both indicate that Jesus and the Baptist had never met each other. Besides, the two were of about the same age. That is implied in the words: "When John heard in prison the works of Jesus, he sent by his disciples and said unto him: Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?"

This question proves that the two were not acquainted with each other. That means: John has not baptized Jesus nor heard the voice out of the heavens which told all that were present that Jesus was the Messiah. The very question of the Baptist indicates that he has never met Jesus.

That is also confirmed by the reply of Jesus. He told the messengers: Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see.

The blind receive their sight and the lame walk.

The lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear.

The dead are raised up and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.

Not a single word of Jesus could be understood as a reproach of the prisoner. No allusion is made to any former acquaintance. The Baptist evidently had heard of Jesus the first time only lately.

The terms blind, lame, lepers a. s. f. do not refer to sicknesses of the body, but are used in a figurative sense. The blind are people who do not see the truth. The lame cannot follow the strait way. The lepers are men whose very faces betrayed their character. The deaf do not care to listen to religious instruction. The dead has lost all interest in the religion of their fathers. The poor, on the other hand, were people who trusted in their Father in heaven and served Him faithfully, but had to suffer from their less pious neighbors.

The men who had all kinds of religious diseases were the retinue and servants of the tetrarchs. They included the soldiers and the officers of the armies of the three sons of Herod as well as the publicans who collected the taxes. All those persons were Jews by birth. Compare Luke iii, 14.

The closing line of Matth. 11, 2-6 has been written for the benefit of John the Baptist and his disciples. They seem to have been

somewhat inclined to criticise the method of Jesus which may have differed from that of John.

Jesus was apparently about as old as John. That is indicated by the people who later imagined Jesus was John who had been sent back to the earth. Others believed Jesus was one of the great prophets of the olden times as either Elizah, or Jeremiah, or somebody else. (Matth. xvi, 14; Mark viii, 27 f; Luke ix, 19.) All those prophets were thought to have been old men when they died.

The fact that the two, Jesus and John, had never met each other, suggests and proves that they never lived together in Palestine, except for a short time. When Jesus returned to his native land, the Baptist was imprisoned. If both had lived in the Holy Land longer than one year, they would have become acquainted with each other at the great feasts in the Temple which every Jew had to attend with his family or friends.

There is another important passage which confirms the just arrived at conclusion. It is found Matth. xiii, 54-57 and reads:

“Coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished and said: Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

And they were offended in him.

But Jesus said unto them: A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

That can only have happened when Jesus after many years of absence returned to his own country and visited first of all his birth-place where the members of his family still lived with the exception apparently of his father. That also is confirmed by the first five words of our text: *Coming into his own country*. These imply that Jesus had been for a long time outside of Palestine.

His intention was to begin in Nazareth his final and greatest work as prophet and Messiah. If he had preached for any length of time in Palestine before he had visited his family and his old friends, his fame would have reached them before they ever met him. They would have been proud of his successes and received him as one of the greatest prophets when at last he visited Nazareth.

The lack of a proper arrangement of the different parts of the Gospels indicates that the editor had no experience in writing a book. He seems to have added them just as they came into his possession. For instance, Matth. xiii. 54-58 brings us back to the day when Jesus had just returned from foreign countries and visited first of all his family and his old friends. That was the beginning of his mission in Palestine.

Matth. xi. 2-6 leads us a little farther. Jesus has become known as prophet and John the Baptist has sent to him from prison some of his disciples. He wishes to learn whether Jesus is the Messiah or not.

Matth. x. 5b-42, or at least the greater part of it, contains the final instructions which Jesus has given his disciples. That brings us to the beginning of his momentous journey to Jerusalem and the Temple.

The editor seems to have added new parts to his Gospel, one after the other, just as they came into his possession. A proper arrangement would have placed Matth. xiii. 54-58 where we find now x. 5b ff. and x. 5b ff. might take the place of xiii. 54-58. Matth. xi. 2-6 could remain where it is. That does not of course remove all the difficulties of our Gospels.

Jesus, according to the Synoptic Gospels, began and ended his prophetic mission in his native country in less than one year. He must have reached his home shortly after the day of Pentecost in the year 28 and was crucified on the day before the paschal lamb was eaten in the year 29. It has however to be remembered that the Jewish day begins at 6 in the evening. That Jesus was crucified on the day before the paschal, is stated John xviii. 28: *His accusers entered not the praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.* That agrees also with Matth. xxvi. 5: Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people.

The Fourth Gospel sends Jesus more than once to Jerusalem (see John v. 1.) But the original and genuine part of that Gospel consists of John ii. 13-17, the cleansing of the Temple; x. 1-18, the Good Shepherd; xi. 47-50, the Plot to put Jesus to Death; xii. 12-16, the Triumphal Entry; xiii. 1 and 3-20, Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet; xviii. 12-40 and xix. 1-32 (with many exceptions) the Seizure, Questioning, Condemnation and Crucifixion of Jesus.

All the later additions have been furnished by a man of Jewish descent who had become the deacon of Polycarp, the bishop of

Smyrna. The Church of Smyrna belonged of course to Gentile Christians. The Jewish believers in Jesus had no Churches, but synagogues. Quite a number of Jewish Christians however followed the example of Paul and joined sooner or later Gentile Churches.

As soon as Polycarp had read the new Gospel, he hastened to Rome in order to present the newly discovered book of John to Anicetus, at that time the bishop of Rome. The bishop of Smyrna was especially interested in calling Anicetus' attention to the day on which Jesus had died on the cross. He seems to have been a young man. For otherwise, he would hardly have started the Quartodeciman movement which is based upon John xviii. 28. The present Gospel has been published between the year 159 and 169, possibly near the year 169.

The deacon of Polycarp must have found the original booklet of John in the home of his parents. He translated it into Greek and made out of it a book by adding all kinds of stories. He gave the book to his bishop who was delighted.

Judas Iscariot has possibly made his first appearance in the Fourth Gospel. He is an invention of the second century. That may be learned from I. Corinthians xv. 5-8. That chapter has not been written by Paul, but by a later writer. It has been added to I. Corinth. and may belong to the Second Century. The words that concern us here are:

He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all he appeared to me a miscarriage.

There is no allusion whatever to a traitor. Moreover people familiar with the Jewish customs as long as the Temple existed, cannot believe that the High Priest would have thought of hiring a stranger whom nobody needed.

Besides, Jesus has had only three companions, Peter, James and John. The twelve Apostles are those whom Paul has appointed for the Gentiles. That may be learned from *The Didache of the Twelve Apostles*, called also *The Didache of the Twelve Apostles of the Gentiles*. Bryennios has discovered that important little book and has it published in Constantinople in the year 1883.

Some officers of the High Priest had only to watch Jesus during

the day in the Temple and follow him in the evening to his quarter where he intended to eat the pascha lamb. That was done of course on the same day on which Jesus has cleansed the Temple. The second night after the cleaning of the Temple, Jesus was arrested.

Jesus, according to the Synoptic Gospels, began and ended his prophetic mission in Palestine within less than one year. He returned to his native land shortly after the day of Pentecost 28 and was crucified on the day before the paschal lamb was eaten in the year 29.

After this necessary deviation, we may try to learn if possible where and why Jesus has been so long away from home Luke has preserved a true story about Jesus when he was twelve years old. His parents went every year to Jerusalem for the feast of the pass-over. At that occasion the son forgot father and mother and remained in the Temple with the Pharisees. His parents found him at length there while he was with the Rabbis, listening to them and asking questions. All that heard him were amazed at his understanding. That revealed his inborn desire of learning all about God. But he did not join the Pharisees. For he had made up his mind, possibly then and there, to become a prophet.

Some of the prophets have written books which have been preserved in the Old Testament. That has induced many to believe that, with a few exceptions, the prophets have died out not long after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar. But that is a mistake. There have been prophets always among the Jews of Palestine till the year 135 A. D. After that time, they have been suppressed also in the Diaspora but mostly by the Gentile Christians.

After Pompey had taken possession of Palestine for Rome 63 B. C., there was a change. Herod and later his sons ruled the province for the Roman Empire. During their supremacy, it became very dangerous for prophets to be found by officers of the king and later of the tetrarchs. Thus John the Baptist lost his life in the year 28 A. D. Jesus himself had to hide for some time in a desert because Herod the tetrarch wanted to arrest him also. Herod Agrippa I. killed James, the brother of John, with his sword. Such happenings must have driven most prophets out of Palestine into the Diaspora. For in all other Roman provinces, the Jewish religion had been declared by the Emperor a *Religio Licita*.

Under such conditions, Jesus like many other young students

left the home of his parents soon after his return from the Temple. His father and mother had become convinced that he was eager to study the art of the prophets in the Diaspora. In any case, he was old enough to take care of himself somewhere in the Roman world. One might compare him with the young scholars of the Middle-Ages. Many of them had to leave also very early their homes and support themselves while they studied. Jesus was the oldest son of a large family and the income of a carpenter in Nazareth less than small. Also the case of Samuel may be referred to. His mother devoted him as a baby to the temple and he became a prophet.

From 63 B. C., the Jews of Palestine grew more and more excited. They believed rightly their God was the only true God. Therefore they were convinced, as long as the Jews were faithful to Him, He would protect His sons against all foreign suppressers. Herod the Great kept them under strict control. That was rather easy for him, because he was related to the High Priest. But after his death in the year 4 B. C., Augustus ordered a census of Herod's kingdom which was to be divided among the sons. The Emperor had therefore to ascertain how much of the tribute had to be paid by each division.

That led to the first revolt of the Jews against the Roman government. The leader was Judas of Gaulanitis who claimed to be the Messiah, Sabinus, not QUIRINIUS, as he is named by mistake Luke ii. 2, was sent by the Emperor to suppress the rebels. Judas and his followers had in the meantime taken possession of the Temple. That famous building was destroyed together with the Jewish defenders after a long siege.

That event must have aroused Jesus and caused him to study more carefully and earnestly than ever before his own conception of God, as well as his God-inspired duty to his people. He more than likely decided to visit for that purpose all the cities of the Roman Empire where Jews were living. That meant, all the cities in which Greeks had their homes in larger numbers. For the Jews always followed the Greeks who were the merchants of the Empire and whom the Jews supplied with the goods. Every great city, no matter where, including Rome itself, was filled with Jews. They were not only prosperous but also protected by the Roman government in their religious life. They had their synagogues and their ancient religion had been declared by the Emperor *Religio Licita*.

No Gentile was permitted to disturb the Jews and their religious meetings.

The Jews had to pay indeed a regular tribute to the government. But every other citizen without exception had to do that also. For that was the only way in which the Empire could defend all subjects against enemies, wicked men and robbers. Besides, cities, streets and roads had to be built and extended in all directions from one end of the Roman country to the other. All these roads had to be kept in perfect condition.

Jesus learned all that in due time and could not fail to recognize the blessing, justice and necessity of what the government of the Gentiles achieved. He also could not help to become acquainted with the Roman armies, the greatest and best the world has ever seen. Jesus was bound to become convinced that his country, Palestine, had no cause whatever to make war against the Romans, and that any attempt to do so would end in the destruction of the Jews at home and the Temple. Jesus himself has foretold the end of the Temple and declared in public that the Roman tribute ought to be paid by the Jews.

Thus Jesus had come to the conclusion that his God was not a God of war but of peace. He had forbidden his disciples to fight for him. The kingdom he was offering to his nation was not a kingdom of this world, but the invisible kingdom that exists in the hearts of his believers.

In closing, we turn to Matth. x, 5b-42. The five parts of it are related to each other. They belong to the last warnings Jesus gave his disciples. He foretold what was to happen to them after his death. For he had not come to send peace on the earth but a sword.

That of course did not mean, his followers should take up swords to fight for their new religion. Jesus had to call their attention to the fact that they had to face the same fate as he. Thus he told them:

He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth
it for my sake shall find it.

Jesus had to warn his disciples of what the future had in store for them. For their countrymen believed, it was their divine duty to fight for their independence. God Himself would guide them to an everlasting victory and establish on earth forever His kingdom under his Messiah.

Jesus had learned among the Romans that the kingdom of God was and would be for ever invisible just as God Himself. He told the people:

The kingdom of God does not come while you wait and watch the sky. Nor shall they say: Look here or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

That was the new message Jesus had to bring his nation. He was convinced that the Jews of the Diaspora were ripe to accept the new revelation. Therefor he sent Peter alone to them. His two other disciples, he assigned to Palestine. For as long as the Jews of the native land did not share the belief of Jesus, the Jews of the Empire would remain doubtful. Of course after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, all the surviving Jews would have believed in the revelation of Jesus.

But in the meantime, Paul had begun to convert Gentiles in defiance of the clear warning and prohibition of the wise Master: What he has foretold, was true. But his work and sacrifice was destroyed. Our Jews believe in the Pharisees. Our Christians have remained Gentiles.