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A RABBINIC GUIDE TO THE GOSPELS

In the preface to his *Antiquities of the Jews* Flavius Josephus, referring to the earlier part of his history, the part paralleling the Biblical record, writes as follows: "As my narrative proceeds, the precise details of our Scripture records will be set forth, each in its place, that being the procedure which I promised to follow throughout this work, neither adding nor omitting anything."¹

But the fact is that in his *Antiquities* in numerous instances Josephus freely departs from the "precise details of our Scripture records", adding or omitting many such details. In his account of the life of Moses, for example, Josephus tells the following story: "[Pharaoh] took and clasped [Moses] affectionately to his breast and to please his daughter, placed his diadem upon [Moses'] head. But Moses tore it off, flung it in mere childishness to the ground, and trampled it underfoot."²

You will not find in the Hebrew Bible the incident just told. In the *Tanhuma*, however, a Midrash on the Book of Exodus, you will find the same incident told with but a slight variation: "When Pharaoh hugged and kissed Moses, Moses took the diadem from Pharaoh's head and flung it hence, as indeed Moses was destined ultimately to do."³

How then are we to understand Josephus' assurance to his readers that he would neither add nor omit anything from our Scriptures? Josephus surely was aware that by consulting the original Scriptures in the Hebrew or in the Greek any of his readers could easily have controverted his assurance. Only one answer is possible. The Oral Tradition, the Deuterosis of the Hebrews, that which we call Haggadah or Midrash, was in the very atmosphere of the time, and the Oral Tradition's free, almost unconscious, penetration into written records was not regarded as a departure from or addition to any text or narrative of the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, Josephus' readers would not reproach him with falsification.

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 17, Loeb Classical Library 4, p.9.

² Josephus, *Antiquities* 2, 233-234, Loeb Classical Library 4, 267.

³ *Tanhuma*, Exod. 8.

Now Josephus completed his *Antiquities* in the nineties of the 1st century of the Christian Era, roughly at a time when the writers of the Gospels had completed or were completing their several lives of Jesus. It is inevitable, accordingly, that the writers of the Gospels, themselves Jews (or writing for a public at least partly Jewish), should have been governed by the same canons in composition which governed Josephus, these canons being the free and continuing utilization of oral traditions. Not only specific practices or *realia*, such as "A Sabbath day's journey off" (Acts 3:12), which refers to the distance of 2000 cubits, that is 3000 feet, beyond which one may not walk on the Sabbath from the city or place where one resides; or the statement that "Paul . . . sailed thence for Syria, and with him . . . Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrae, the seaport of Corinth, for he had a vow" (Acts 18:18; 21:24), which of course refers to the vow to be a Nazirite, so that until the expiration of his Nazirite term Aquila was not permitted to drink wine or cut his hair. Nor do I have in mind merely traditional ways of characterizing certain persons in the Hebrew Bible, such characterization as is implied in the statement "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright" (Heb. 12:16).⁴ Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible will you find Esau described as "a fornicator or profane person." But the Rabbinic, that is, the Oral Tradition, is quite clear on this matter, namely, that Esau was an idolator, a rapist, a murderer, and that he denied the after life.⁵ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, aware of this tradition concerning Esau, without any attempt to prove the grave charges, described Esau as "a fornicator and a profane person," knowing full well that all who read such a description would know precisely the reasons for making it, and not regard him, the author of Hebrews, that is, as departing from or falsifying the text of Scripture.

But not only occasional *realia* or the characterization of a person such as Esau are drawn from Oral Tradition and enter into and must be utilized for the proper understanding of the New Testament. There are general patterns of thought which Oral Traditions and the New Testament share; there is a community of literary and religious associations far more subtle and more complicated than the definition of a Sabbath day's journey, a Nazirite's vow, or the customary blackening of Esau's character.

The story of John the Baptist in Mark 1:6 illustrates Oral Tradition's penetration into the very texture of the New Testament. Here is

⁴ The parallels in 3 Macc. 2:2, 14; and 7:15 indicate that the context in which the term 'profane' is used implies profanation, defiling, acts verging on blasphemy.

⁵ *Targum Jonathan* on Gen. 25:29 and *Pesikta Rabbati* 12:4.

how Mark speaks of John: “And John was clothed with camel’s hair and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey.” This description, is no mere foray into male couture or desert gastronomy. The description of John was intended to echo the description of Elijah the Tishbite, ‘A man with a garment of hair and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins’ (2 Kings 1:8). But much more was intended by the verbal parallel. In Oral Tradition Elijah is the forerunner, the harbinger of the Messiah, a role exceeding by far Malachi’s description of Elijah as ‘one who shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers’ (Mal. 3:24). According to the Gospel, John is a type of Elijah whose role as the Messiah’s harbinger is elaborated only in Oral Tradition, wherein is set forth the part Elijah was to play in the redemption. Accounts of Elijah, such as the one below, constituted the Oral, the unwritten Tradition which Mark had in mind when he spoke of John as “clothed with camel’s hair and a leathern girdle about his loins.” In the passage I cite, it is said:

“Three days before the Messiah comes, Elijah will come and stand upon the mountains of Israel and weep and lament upon them, but then will say: Behold, O Land of Israel, how short a time before you cease to be a waste land, dry and desolate! Elijah’s voice will be heard from world’s end to world’s end. And then he will say to the children of Israel: Peace has come to the world, as is said *Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that announceth peace.* (Nahum 2:1). When the wicked hear this, they will rejoice, every one of them, saying one to another, ‘Peace has come to us.’ On the second day Elijah will come and stand upon the mountains of Israel and say: Good has come to the world, as is said *The messenger of good tidings* (Isaiah 52:7). On the third day he will come and say, Salvation has come to the world, as is said *That announceth salvation* (*ibid.*). But when he understands the wicked to be saying that peace, good and salvation are for them as well, he will add *Unto Zion, thy God reigneth* (*ibid.*)—that is, salvation is come to Zion and to her children, but not to the wicked. In that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, will show His Glory and His kingship to all the inhabitants of the world: He will redeem Israel, and He will appear at the head of them, as is said *The breaker is gone up before them; they have broken forth and passed, by the gate, and are gone out thereat; and their king is passed on before them, and the Lord at the head of them* (Micah 2:13).”⁶

To come back to John. You will recall that moved by prophecy Zacharias told his son John: “Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people” (Luke 1:76-7). These words spoken to John describe John’s role very much in the manner that the Midrashic passage I just cited sets forth Elijah’s role as the forerunner of the Messiah.

⁶ Pesikta Rabbati, 35.4.

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My topic, an attempt to indicate Oral Tradition's role in the understanding of the New Testament, is "A Rabbinic Guide to the Gospels," a subject so vast that it might take a lifetime to encompass. I shall therefore limit myself to four themes: (1) the motive or purpose of the woman who touched the tassel of Jesus' garment; (2) the theological implications seen in Jesus' healing of the blind, the lame, and the lepers; (3) the theological meaning read into the miracle of the Galileans who "when the day of Pentecost was come" were able to speak in the language of "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:1-12); and finally, the import and reconciliation of the two genealogies of Jesus.

To Jews in Galilee, in Judea and throughout the Diaspora, to Jews conversant with their Oral Traditions, the Christian narrators and preachers spoke of sick people who touched a tassel of Jesus' garment; spoke of miracles of healing which Jesus deliberately performed; with great excitement reported that on Pentecost, untutored Galilean disciples were able to converse in the language of every nation; and finally, these Christian preachers in the role of Chroniclers, were so untroubled by inconsistencies and conflicts in the names of Joseph's forbears that they nonchalantly continued to set down and recite both genealogies of Jesus, the one in Matthew and the one in Luke.

I shall endeavour to demonstrate that the tassel as a symbol, Jesus' clamant acts of healing, the universal speech of the Galileans, and even the inconsistent genealogies, that all of these, Christian preachers utilized to sing of the Messiah, to sing forth the adoration which was given to him, to sing the promise of his coming, the range of his reach, and lastly the story of his agony, death, resurrection and triumph. I will also endeavour to demonstrate that such singing forth became full-throated only because preachers and congregations alike moved in the atmosphere of and were conversant with the Oral Tradition of the Jews.

Now to the details of the four themes whereby I hope to validate the statements I just made:

Mark, Matthew and Luke tell of sick people who besought that they might only touch the border, properly the tassel, of Jesus' garment (Mt. 14:36); and tell also of "a woman having an issue of blood twelve years" who came behind Jesus and touched the border, more precisely "the tassel of his garment."⁷ In his commentary on Luke, Alfred Plummer writes of the woman: "Her faith is tinged with superstition. She believes that Christ's garments heal magically,

⁷ Luke 8:44, also Mt. 9:20, Mk. 5:28, 6:56.

independent of his will'.⁸ Respectfully, I beg to differ. Note that the woman or the sick people did not reach out to just any part of Jesus' garments. The woman reached out and so did the sick people (as Alfred Plummer himself rightly points out) to the tassels, the precise meaning of the Greek *Kraspedon* or *Kraspeda*, the tassels which in Jewish practice were and are a continued reminder of the obligation to keep God's commands. 'Bid [the children of Israel],' Scripture says, 'that they make them throughout their generations fringes, tassels', that is 'in the corners of their garments, and that they put with the fringe of each corner, with the tassel,' 'a thread of blue . . . that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them' (Num. 15:38-39). Now the thread of blue which, it goes without saying, Jesus wore, was made out of a rare mollusk found off Haifa, a city that the Romans called *Purpureon* by way of alluding to the dye of blue made out of the mollusk. For the Jew, the thread of blue symbolized perfection, God's own seal. Meditating upon the colour blue, R. Meir, a 2nd century Rabbi, used to say: "Why is blue different from all other colours? Because blue has the appearance of the sea, the sea has the appearance of heaven, heaven has the appearance of the throne of glory." Thus through the colour blue one comes to know Him who sits on the throne of glory.⁹

For the sick people accordingly, as well as for the woman who touched the tassels of Jesus' garment from which threads of blue hung, the act of touching was an act of adoration. The sick people believed, which is what the authors of the Gospels mean to tell us, that Jesus was the Messiah, the living rule, so to speak, through whom one might come to know Him who sits on the throne of glory. Touching the tassel of Jesus' garment was the physical counterpart of the cry of the Canaanite woman or of the cries of the two blind men sitting by the wayside who said, "Lord, have mercy on us, thou son of David" (Mt. 15:22; 20:30); or of "the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna, to the son of David" (Mt. 21:9). All of these, whether they touched the tassel of Jesus' garment, or cried "Son of David" expressed the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. And those who were healed, were healed not because of "the tinge of superstition in their faith", as Alfred Plummer would have it, but because of the pure, flame-like intensity of the faith which they had in Jesus. The thread of blue upon his garment symbolized for the sick people the perfection of the life which Jesus led.

⁸ International Critical Commentary, p.235.

⁹ B. Menahot 43b and Rashi ad loc.

I come now to the second theme, to the miracles of healing which, according to the writers of the Gospels, Jesus performed with a certain *éclat*, in the sight of all who had eyes to see. I refer to "the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others" cast down at Jesus' feet, and, according to Mt. 15:30, Jesus "healed them." I have in mind the other statement in Matthew (4:24): "And the rumour about him went into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were in evil plight, holden with manifold sicknesses and torments, demoniacs and lunatics, and paralytics; and He healed them."¹⁰ I shan't go into the nature or authenticity of miracles. My concern is the theological motive which Matthew had in recording these particular miracles. Matthew's motive, it seems to me, is hinted at in the passage "Then there was brought to him a demoniac, blind and dumb; and he healed him, so that the dumb spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were astonished and said, 'Is this indeed the son of David?'" (Mt. 12:22-23).

Why, should the multitudes at the sight of a demoniac blind and dumb healed of his disability, have been moved to ask, "Is this the son of David? Is this the Messiah?" For a very good reason, indeed, as I will endeavour to demonstrate. In Oral Tradition the Messiah's coming was linked with the revelation of a new creed, an event accompanied by miraculous healing. In a Midrash associated with R. Akiba, who flourished in Palestine in the early part of the 2nd century, we find the following, "On Sinai two creeds the Holy One, blessed be He, entrusted to Israel, one [was given then and there] to Israel; and the other [is ultimately to be given] to the Messiah."¹¹ And also: "In the Garden of Eden the Holy One, blessed be He, expounds to the righteous of the world, the details of the new Torah, [the new Revelation] which the Holy One, blessed be He, will give them through the Messiah."¹² At Sinai where the Jews had experienced the first revelation, the maimed, the blind and the deaf, as I have just intimated, became whole. With the revelation at Sinai, Oral Tradition associates wholeness of body and mind. The following passage is characteristic of the link between Sinai and well being.

"Here you are to have a completely new experience which you will have again only in the time-to-come. As in the time-to-come, *The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped* (Isa. 35:5) [so that all will see and all will hear], so here, too, for Scripture says, *All the people . . . said: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do"* (Exod. 19:8); and all the people saw the thunderings (*ibid.* 20:15). As in the time-to-come, *Then shall the lame man leap as a hart* (Isa. 35:6), so here, too, for Scripture says, *Moses brought forth the people*

¹⁰ Willoughby Allen's translation in *International Critical Commentary*, p.36.

¹¹ *Midrash Otiyot de R. Akiba*, ed. Wertheimer, 2, 346, Cf. John 1:17.

¹² *ibid.* 2, 367-68.

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out of the camp to meet God; and they, [even the lame], stood at the nether part of the mount (Exod. 19:17). As in the time-to-come, *The tongue of the dumb shall sing* (Isa. 35:6), so here, too, for Scripture says, *All the people sang out together*, etc. (Exod. 19:8).¹³

So now, at the sight of the maimed, the blind and the deaf made whole by Jesus, the multitudes were impelled to cry out: "Is this not the son of David? Is not the time-to-come already here?"

It goes without saying that the writer of Matthew was eager to set down the wonders which Jesus performed; but he was at least equally concerned so it would seem, in the light of Oral Tradition, with spreading the good tidings: The Messiah is here. Behold, because of his coming, all people, the dumb and the deaf alike, are able to sing out together.

In the words of Matthew, Jesus went about "proclaiming the good tidings of the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease among the people," (Mt. 4:23), the healing being the antecedent condition, so to speak, of the proclamation of the good tidings of the kingdom.

Similarly, the accounts in Acts concerning "the tongues parting among them like as of fire; and it sat upon each of the disciples" (Acts 2:3) can only be understood as a condition antecedent to and accompanying the new revelation which is to follow the Messiah's coming. We are told in Acts that the disciples

"Began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance . . . And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, 'Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every one in our own language, wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites . . . Cretans and Arabians, we do hear them speaking in our own tongues the mighty words of God'" (Acts 2:4-12).¹⁴

All we need to get the impact of these words is to set by their side the following passage from the Midrash on Psalms:

"*The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it* (Ps. 68:12). When the Holy One, blessed be He, whose name and whose might are to be praised, gave forth the divine word, the voice divided itself into seven voices, and from the seven voices passed into the seventy languages of the seventy nations, so that all men understood it. Hence it is said *Great was the company of those that published it.*"¹⁵

Even as of the word given on Sinai, Oral Tradition affirms "all understood it;" so, too, of the word given through Jesus, the writer of Acts has men coming from many lands, cry out: "How hear we, every man in our own language, wherein we were born?" To the

¹³ *Pesikta Rabbati*, 15.22.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:10, 12.

¹⁵ Midrash on Psalms 68.6; *Yale Judaica Series*, Vol. 13, 1, 541.

writer of Acts, the speaking "with other tongues" was but another proof of revelation, "which divided itself into seven voices, and the seven voices passed into the seventy languages of the seventy nations."

Thus far I endeavoured to set forth the symbolic meaning of touching the tassel of Jesus' garment, the theological significance of the miracles he performed, the revelational overtones in the disciples' speaking "with other tongues." I come now to the most baffling of the four themes I promised to discuss: to the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke. There is no need to dwell at length on the inconsistencies which they contain and the problems they raise. Suffice it to say that in Matthew Joseph's father was Jacob and in Luke Eli; that in Matthew, Joseph was descended from Solomon the son of David; and in Luke he was descended from Nathan the son of David.

The attempts to reconcile the contradictions between the two genealogies are familiar to many. In the 2nd century Julius Africanus propounded the theory of a levirate marriage: Jacob and Eli were brothers, one died, the survivor married the widow, and therefore Joseph the father of Jesus could have been designated as being either the son of Jacob or the son of Eli. "The objections" to this theory says B. W. Bacon, "are overwhelming."¹⁶

The other principal theory is linked with the name of Annius of Viterbo (c.1490). It assumes that "the pedigree of Luke is not that of Joseph but of Mary," the Greek *tou* in one version of this theory being translated not "son of" but "son-in-law of."¹⁷

It is not for me to pass judgement on these harmonistic devices. All that I shall attempt is to look at the two genealogies as a Jew living in the 1st or 2nd century might have looked at them and, what is more important, learned to live with them. Such a Jew, to begin with, was not unfamiliar with inconsistent genealogies. In Chronicles, for example, genealogies are set down, now and then, which are in clear conflict with corresponding genealogies in other parts of the Bible.

Then, too, the Jew of the 1st or 2nd century never permitted a list of names to remain inert, to teach nothing except the "begats" which work the succession of generations. Every word in Holy Writ was meant to teach, to edify, even the endless series of names in the Books of Chronicles. "The names in the Books of Chronicles must be expounded so as to instruct the people,"¹⁸ in order that not a single word in Scripture will contradict another, or, and this is even worse, remain inert, convey no meaning or guidance whatsoever. That no passage is to contradict another; and that no word in Scripture is to

¹⁶ *Dictionary of the Bible*, 2, 138.

¹⁷ *ibid.* 2, 139.

¹⁸ *Lev. Rabbah* 1:3, ed. Margulies, p.8.

lead, insofar as meaning is concerned, into a blind alley are two basic principles in Jewish exegesis.

Two examples will illustrate these two principles. The genealogies of Bezalel, the builder of the Tabernacle in the wilderness possess, on a somewhat reduced scale, the kind of inconsistencies we find in the genealogies of Jesus. Thus 1 Chron. 2:19-20 gives Bezalel more ancestors than his pedigree in Exod. 31:2 gives him; even as Luke gives Jesus more ancestors than Matthew gives him. There are a number of other and somewhat complicated difficulties in the genealogies of Bezalel which I shall not go into. Our concern now is to find out by analogy with Bezalel's inconsistent pedigrees, how in the 1st and 2nd centuries Christians either Jewish in origin or influenced by Jewish patterns of thinking construed the two genealogies of Jesus. In the Jewish community Jews who were counterparts of such Christians were troubled by the verse. 'And Reiah the son of Shobal begat Jahath; and Jahath begat Ahumai, and Lahad' (1 Chron. 4:2), a verse in the passage which deals with Bezalel's pedigree. Partly in order to reconcile the inconsistency in the pedigrees of Bezalel Jewish students of Scripture transferred the "begats" to the preceding verse where they are needed; and in this verse construed the series of names as in truth describing Bezalel's extraordinary qualities: "Reiah"—the man who saw God's own pattern for the Tabernacle; "Shobal"—he who set up that which was to protect Israel; "Jahath"—for out of the Tabernacle there was to come the fear of God; "Ahumai"—a fear which was to knit Isreal to God; and "Lahad"—bestow glory and majesty upon Israel.¹⁹

Note, and this will have bearing upon the proposed reading of Luke's genealogy of Jesus, how in the instance of Bezalel, people influenced by the norms of Oral Tradition have translated a succession of names into a description of the architect, of the Tabernacle he built and of its significance in the span of Jewish history.

Now to the second example by way of introducing my endeavour to resolve the baffling genealogy of Jesus in Luke. I said that Jewish commentators never permitted an isolated occurrence of a name to remain inert, or to have no meaning. Take the statement in Chronicles that Malchiel, grandson of the tribe-father Asher, was 'father of Birzaith' (1 Chron. 7:31).²⁰ Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible will you find kith or kin for Birzaith or any clue to the meaning of this word. The word is a *hapax legomenon*, an inert bit of linguistic matter, something which makes a Jewish commentator shudder. Now there was a tradition that the daughters of the Tribe of Asher were known

¹⁹ *Exod. Rabbah* 40:4.

²⁰ Cf. Gen. 46:17.

far and wide for their beauty, so that sons of high priests and sons of royalty alike: sons of families, that is, anointed with olive oil, sought to marry the daughters of Asher. Hence Malchiel, grandson of Asher, was understood as *abi birzaith*—“father of children born in families anointed by *zaith*, by the oil of the olive.” Whatever you may think of this sort of exegesis, it does serve to give meaning to words which otherwise would remain completely obscure.

By these remarks, prepared, I hope, for what is to follow, we proceed to the problem of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew and Luke and particularly in Luke. Let us try to recreate the *Sitz im Leben*, the existential or life situation of the Christian community in the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Jesus, the son of David, died on the cross. Jesus, he whose tassels sick people moved by adoration for him, would seek to touch; he who performed all manner of miracles of healing to demonstrate that the Son of David had in truth arrived and with him the new revelation: the same Jesus was now dead. To be sure, they who believed in him proclaimed his resurrection. But there were scoffers who denied it, who said that someone had secretly made off with the body, that in fact Jesus had not come back to life.

There was another baffling matter which the Christian community faced, on a much lesser scale to be sure, but baffling nevertheless: the account of the ancestry of Jesus as set forth at the very beginning of the Gospel, in Matthew, and as set forth further on in the Gospels in Luke was inconsistent. Can it be, Christians trained in the methods of Jewish exegesis, asked: Can it be that the two genealogies of Jesus contain the answer to the painful taunt: “Jesus, Jesus, the son of David is dead?” I suggest that the early Christians’ answer to this question was “Yes”.

In what follows, I shall endeavour to reconstruct the manner in which early Christians spelled out their answer to the taunt: “Your Jesus, he who you said was the son of David is dead.”

The genealogy in Matthew begins: “The book of the generations of Jesus Christ the son of David . . . David the King (Mt. 1:1, 6). Joseph is brought in, to be sure, but merely as “the husband of Mary.” The genealogy as a whole is on a note of triumph, breathing as it were the Resurrection. In the genealogy of Luke, the tone is different. Jesus is identified at once as the son of Joseph. And the name Joseph occurs three more times in the Lucan genealogy. Now in Oral Tradition, the name Joseph when linked with the Messiah, Messiah son of Joseph, that is, strikes a sombre note. For Messiah the son of Joseph was in Westcott’s word to bear “the natural sum of human

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sorrow”²¹ “and in the end to be slain.”²² Let me give you just one account of the manner in which the ordeal of Messiah the son of Joseph was depicted in the Oral Tradition.

It is taught that in the month of Nisan the Patriarchs will arise and say to the Messiah: Ephraim, our true Messiah, even though we are thy forbears, thou art greater than we because thou didst suffer for the iniquities of our children, and terrible ordeals befell thee, such ordeals as did not befall earlier generations or later ones; for the sake of Israel thou didst become a laughingstock and a derision among the nations of the earth; and didst sit in darkness, in thick darkness, and thine eyes saw no light, and thy skin cleaved to thy bones and thy body was as dry as a piece of wood; and thine eyes grew dim from fasting, and thy strength was dried up like a potsherd—all these afflictions on account of the iniquities of our children, all these because of thy desire to have our children benefit by that goodness which the Holy One, blessed be He, will bestow in abundance upon Israel.²³

Now having given an example of the manner in which Oral Tradition depicts Messiah the son of Joseph, we are able to come closer to the way in which the early Christians confronted the two genealogies of Jesus: What, asked the early Christians, do Nazareth and Bethlehem, the two loci associated with the birth and upbringing of Jesus signify? Nazareth is in the North in Galilee, in the Land of Joseph. Bethlehem is in the south in Judah, in the realm of David. Can it be, so the early Christians reasoned, that Jesus combined in his person the two Messiahs? Messiah of Joseph—symbolized by Nazareth—the son of Joseph doomed to die; and Messiah the son of David—symbolized by Bethlehem—the Messiah destined to rise from the dead? And furthermore, they reasoned: the two genealogies in a riddling way mean to tell us the story of the two Messiahs: in Matthew, Messiah the son of David; in Luke, Messiah the son of Joseph: “In the one case a royal infant born by a regal title to a glorious inheritance; and in the other a ministering saviour who bears the natural sum of human sorrow.”²⁴

The Lucan genealogy, so Westcott rightly says, endeavours to tell the story of Jesus’ bearing “the natural sum of human sorrow.” Here is how, I suggest, a Christian born to or schooled in Oral Tradition of the Jews might have come to see in the Lucan genealogy “the natural sum of human sorrow.”

I begin with Luke 3:23: “Jesus being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, (*tou*, literally) “of Eli.” The particle *tou* has a wide range of

²¹ See Luke, *International Critical Commentary*, p.105.

²² *B. Sukkah* 52a.

²³ *Pesikta Rabbati*, 37.1 See also *B. Sanhedrin* 98a.

²⁴ Westcott, *Introduction to the Gospels*, 7th ed. p.136.

Quoted in *International Critical Commentary*, *Luke*, p.105.

meaning. A Christian schooled in Oral Tradition could have read the particle *tou* as, "pertaining to," "a type of," or "symbol of" Eli; Eli, the ill-starred priest of Shiloh who lived to see the ark of God taken, and whose grandson was named Ichabod which meant 'The glory of God is departed from Israel' (I Sam. 5:18-21). You will recall that Jesus had spoken of himself as greater than *Hieros*, greater than the temple (Mt. 12:6), than, if you will, "the ark of the covenant" which, as in the days of Eli of Shiloh, was again seized and taken away. Such is the *Matthat*, the present bestowed upon *Levi*, upon Jesus, upon him who was attached to God since Jesus is *Melchi* "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38). But the Lord will have mercy, *Jannai*, upon the Messiah son of *Joseph*, for it is *Mattathias*, the bestowing is the Lord's. "*Amos, Nahum, Esli, Naggai*" (Luke 3:25). Though laden with sorrows (*Amos*), comforting (*Nahum*) is sure to come, for to Jesus, whom God had set apart (*Esli*), pertains splendour (*Naggai*).

Shattering was the blow of Jesus' death, great was the ruin and desolation—*Mahath*. To understand fully the impact of the word *Mahath*, "ruin and desolation" we will recall several verses in Ps. 89, verses which a Christian alive to the tradition of the Jews might have had in mind when he came to this part of Luke's genealogy. Here are the verses:

But Thou hast cast off and rejected,
 Thou has been wroth with Thine anointed.
 Thou hast abhorred the covenant of Thy servant;
 Thou hast profaned his crown even to the ground.
 Thou hast broken down all his fences;
 Thou hast brought his strongholds to ruin.
 All that pass by the way spoil him;
 He is become a taunt to his neighbours . . .
 The days of his youth hast Thou shortened;
 Thou hast covered him with shame . . .
 Thine enemies have taunted, O Lord . . .
 They have taunted the footsteps of
 Thine anointed.²⁵

Still *Mattathias*, the bestowing is the Lord God's, who had heard (*Semei*) the cry of Messiah the son of Joseph. Accordingly, *Joda*, we shall have cause to praise the Lord.

I will omit verses 27-30 in Luke, verses which may also be construed in the manner suggested in my exposition thus far and take up a key

²⁵ Ps. 89:39-42, 46, 52.

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verse, v. 31, as a Christian schooled in Oral Tradition might have understood it: *Melea, Menna, Mattatha, Nathan, David*. "Though fulfillment (*Melea*) of the things which have been spoken from the Lord" (Luke 1:45) is here; there has been *Menna*, a delay; such is *Mattatha*, the bestowal; but since the giving, *Nathan*, is God's, therefore he who as Messiah son of Joseph died has risen again as Messiah son of David.

And now to the conclusion. Larrimore Crockett, Congregationalist minister and chaplain at Brown University has just completed a doctoral dissertation entitled "The Old Testament and Luke". He and I, I felt, agreed in our judgement concerning the strong intermingling of early Christian and Rabbinic traditions; and so I asked him to prepare a brief statement dealing with this intermingling which is the theme of the paper. Here is his statement: "The world of Judaism, its belief and expectations, its language, worship and exegesis, are more decisive for the understanding of the New Testament than any other thought-world contemporary to Jesus and the early church. [To be sure], the oral tradition is most apparent in the teaching of Jesus, the letters of Paul, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Book of Revelation and the Gospels of Matthew and John. But even in a manifestly hellenistic document such as Luke-Acts, there is evidence that in his interpretation of the Septuagint, the author used methods of exegesis common in the Rabbinic schools and the . . . homilies [of the Synagogue]. Judaism is not simply the cradle of Christian faith; . . . rather, it is that [particular] pattern [which] above all others woven into Christian faith must be rediscovered afresh in every age."

WILLIAM G. BRAUDE

Temple Beth El
Providence R.I.