

## Jewish-Christians in the period 70 CE - 135 CE

The term Jewish-Christians<sup>1</sup> is a misnomer (although they were sometimes called Jewish-Christians or “believers” even in ancient sources), which is much discussed in scholarship. Suffice to say that they are Jews who kept the law but regarded Jesus as the messiah. These were the first and second century Christians in the land of Israel (this chapter does not focus on Diaspora Christians). As far as law-keeping is concerned we think here of the apostle Paul (a Jewish Rabbi), who had Timothy circumcised and performed vows in the temple. Jewish-Christians (we use the term loosely) did not reject the law but like Paul they put it into perspective and saw Christ as the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. In contrast, the Rabbis rejected Christ as the messiah and doubled down on Law-keeping as a means of salvation. The extension of the gospel to the gentiles by Paul caused friction (even amongst Jewish-Christians) but was accepted by the Jerusalem council with caveats concerning ritual purity etc. In the end Jewish-Christians were just Jews who believed that Jesus was the messiah. They did not become a separate “religion” until later and even when Christianity separated from its roots Jewish believing (Christian) communities remained in Syria-Palestine and developed their own unique forms of Christianity with the law etc still central to some extent.

The situation after 70 is therefore complex. Some Jewish-Christians fled to Pella during the Roman siege of Jerusalem during the first revolt (more on this anon). Others remained in Galilee, where the family of Jesus dwelt (half-brothers, cousins etc) and many priests retired to the same region after the fall of the temple. Apparently, despite the descriptions given by Josephus, the region of Galilee was not as ravaged by the first revolt as regional Judea and particularly Jerusalem bore the brunt of Roman wrath, Jewish-Christians who hid in the Galilee region could have avoided much of the troubles. We do not know whether the returning priests were friendly or hostile<sup>2</sup> but they became neighbours of Jesus’ family. Jesus’ family was investigated by the Roman emperors at least on three occasions ostensibly to nip any nascent messianic movement in the bud (more on this anon) but were deemed harmless. After the death of James the brother of the Lord, Simeon the son of Clopas, first cousin of Jesus and James became the successor in the leadership of the Jerusalem church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term Christians is first found in Antioch among Latin-Greek speakers (Acts 11.27) the Semitic (Aramaic) term became “Nazarenes”.

<sup>2</sup> **Acts 6:7** And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

<sup>3</sup> Hist.eccl.3.11

During this time Mary was under John's care and may have accompanied him to Ephesus where he is thought to have resided for some time. Many Jewish and Gentile Christian converts (again a false distinction) had perished in the Nero persecution of ca.65 and much of the first generation (including most of the apostles) had already perished by the time the temple fell. The generation after the fall of the temple was therefore mainly the second generation of Christians with perhaps some youngsters (Timothy?) surviving this transition.

The Bar Kochba revolt in ca 132 CE saw Judea completely devastated but the region of Galilee largely untouched (again). Some ancient sources suggest another flight of Christians (to Pella?) during this period but the Galilee region would probably have been a safe-haven for Christians. The persecutions wrought against Jewish-Christians recorded by patrician sources have been much discussed by scholarship and it seems undeniable that some form of persecution was instigated by Bar Kochba during the revolt in Judea.

A section from Philip S. Alexander's chapter on Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature<sup>4</sup> has been included here to clarify the background, "There are no good grounds for believing that the group of rabbis who gathered at Yavneh<sup>5</sup> to begin a reconstruction of Judaism in the aftermath of the fall of the temple in 70 CE represented anything more than a sect, or party within Judaism. They may have been well organised, and ably led by respected scholars, but they were only one of a number of sects or parties within Palestinian Judaism at the time, and in no sense can they be regarded as at this stage representing Jewish orthodoxy. This party over the next one hundred and fifty years was to make a successful bid for power within Judaism. It was to claim, with increasing emphasis and success, that its position did represent normative Judaism and that the views of its ideological opponents constituted heresy, which put them in some sense outside the community of Israel (*Kelal Yisra'el*). This was a new and momentous development within Israel, which stood in marked contrast to the broad pluralism of the Second Temple period... [pp., 665-6]....The struggle between the rabbinic party and the Jewish Christians was probably publicly fought out in the synagogue. There were other important communal institutions in Judaism, but they were unlikely to have been a battleground, largely because Jewish Christians would have had little involvement in them. They held a narrowly *religious* view of Judaism, which effectively meant that they withdrew from much of the political life of the community. They would have had no interest in dominating the law courts, or even the schools. They were deeply sectarian. By way of contrast, the rabbis, though probably a minority party in

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<sup>4</sup> Philip S. Alexander, Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature (2d to 5th Centuries) in Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, (eds., Oskar Skarsaune, Reidar Hvalvik, Hendrickson Publishers, 2007); 659-709

<sup>5</sup> Ed: One of the major ancient cities in the southern coastal plain, situated 20 km (12.43 mi) south of Jaffa

Palestinian Judaism down to the mid third century CE., aspired from the outset to control every aspect of Jewish communal life and to bring it into conformity with their understanding of the Torah. They were a much more political movement, with a broader view of Judaism. In the end they dominated the law courts (*bateidin*) and applied rabbinic law in them. Their power-base was their academies (*batei midrash*) where they trained their followers and then sent them out into the community to act as arbitrators (*dayyanim*) and to teach the rabbinic way of life. They probably increasingly influenced the lower levels of the educational system, such as it was, from which they recruited students to their Yeshivahs. The seeds of its failure were sown in the narrowness of Jewish Christianity. It is hardly surprising that it found itself increasingly isolated within Jewish society. It conceded too much ground to the rabbinic party without a fight. In retrospect its elimination looks almost inevitable [pp., 676-8]. And Alexander's conclusion: "The classic rabbinic literature of the Talmudic period reveals less about the concrete details of Jewish Christianity than one might have hoped. More information can doubtless be squeezed out of the evidence that we have considered, if we correlate it fully and systematically with Christian sources, but this study has deliberately limited itself to the rabbinic texts. Yet even if we invoke the comparative material the yield of hard historical and social data is still likely to be meagre. We catch a glimpse here and there of Jewish Christians in Palestine living side-by-side with rabbinical Jews, socializing at various levels, attending the same synagogues in the early period, buying and selling, participating in the same communal occasions such as marriages, frequenting the same communal baths, discussing and arguing in the Street about the interpretation of Torah. We hear of Christian healers who healed rabbinical Jews in the name of Jesus. But the picture remains fuzzy. One reason for this, as we argued, was the deliberate decision of the rabbis to ignore Christianity as much as they could. From the Tannaitic period they adopted the strategy of trying to separate rabbinical Jews and Christians, to acknowledge as little as possible the existence of Christianity as a living movement in their environment. Nevertheless, the rabbinic evidence, such as it is, is vital for understanding the fate of Jewish Christianity. It shows how the rabbinic movement politically out-manoeuvred Jewish Christianity within the Jewish communities, first in Palestine and then in the Diaspora, till by the fifth century Jewish Christianity seems virtually to have disappeared, and Rabbinism to have triumphed comprehensively. The rabbinic movement entered the post-70 period as only one of a number of parties bidding for power in Israel. It set out to define itself as Jewish orthodoxy. It categorized the groups which opposed it, including the Jewish Christians, as heretical. By the beginning of the third century it probably had largely stamped its authority on the synagogues, on the law courts, on the educational system and more generally on Jewish society. Jewish Christianity, as a result, was increasingly marginalized.

Curiously, however, from the late third century onwards, just when the triumph of rabbinism was beginning to look assured, at least in Palestine, the rabbinic sources become more open about Christianity, more directly engaged with it. This may well be a measure of the rabbis' confidence, but it would also have become more and more difficult to ignore Christianity, especially after the time of Constantine, when the Roman empire "went over to *minut*" [ed., heresy]. However, this engagement with Christianity was probably largely with Gentile Christianity, rather than with Jewish Christianity. Increasingly pressurized by rabbinic Judaism, effectively abandoned by the Gentile churches who doubted its orthodoxy, Jewish Christianity as an identifiable entity seems by the fifth century to have all but disappeared, at least in the main centres of Jewish population in the Mediterranean world and the Levant [pp., 708-9]. Aspects of the above summary will be examined in more detail in the next section.

## The flight to Pella ca 70 CE

The Christian historian Eusebius relates a story of the Jerusalem Christians fleeing to Pella, a gentile city across the Jordan (Hist. eccl. 3,5.3). However, S.G.F. Brandon questioned whether the Pella episode is authentic and argued that Eusebius may have told the story in order to authenticate a later Christian community in that area and his hypothesis has been accepted by some scholars.

The following excerpt, discussion and notes is reproduced in *toto* (with minor cosmetic alterations) from *The Flight to Pella* by Paul N. Tobin who is an atheist (ex-Christian), however, his historical research on this subject is sound.<sup>6</sup>

There is a tradition that attests to the flight of the Jerusalem Church, just before or during the siege of city, into a town called Pella in the region of the Decapolis across the Jordan River.<sup>7</sup> [The map below shows the relative positions of Jerusalem and Pella.]

In the past the veracity of this tradition was held without question. Then in the middle of the twentieth century, S.G.F. Brandon in his book *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* provided some arguments against it that led most scholars to abandon their belief in its historicity. Today, scholars take diametrically opposite positions on this, many of them due to pre-set theological agenda.<sup>8</sup> Here we will survey the available evidence and make our own decision.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rejectionofpascalswager.net/pella.html> [Accessed April 2017]

<sup>7</sup> Gerd Ludemann, who is rather skeptical of the Pella tradition, suggested another flight tradition, one in which the relatives of Jesus fled from Nazareth to Cochaba, in Batanaea. (See the map) The evidence is one cited by Eusebius in History of the Church 1:7:14 which, on provide an excerpt from the writings of Julius Africanus, a second century CE Christian writer (c.160-c240). Africanus in that excerpt tied the relatives of Jesus (the *desposynoi*) to Cochaba after Nazareth. This led Ludemann to conclude that there is some tradition tied into the fleeing of Jesus' relatives to Cochaba to escape the effects of the war. Ludemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity*: p123-128

<sup>8</sup> Most fundamentalists/evangelicals tend to accept the historicity of the tradition since it allows continuity between the Gentile Jerusalem church that was established after the second Jewish revolt in Aelia Capitolina. [Aelia

- It is important to first line out the primary documents that mentioned this flight.
- We will then analyse these document for the possible source (or sources) underlying them.
- We will then look at the various arguments as to the plausibility of such a flight.
- We conclude that the flight to Pella was historical

### Primary Documents on the Pella Flight

The extant explicit references on a flight to Pella are those by the Church Fathers Eusebius (c260-c340) in his *History of the Church* (c325 CE), Epiphanius (c315-403), Bishop of Salamis in his books *Panarion* (c374-376) & *On Measures and Weights* and the so-called *Pseudo-Clementines* (c 4th century CE).<sup>9</sup> We give them all below:

History of the Church 3:5:3

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella.

Panarion 29:7:7-8

The Nazoraean sect exists in Beroea near Coele Syria, in the Decapolis near the region of Pella, and in Bashan in the place called Cocaba, which in Hebrew is called Chochabe. That is where the sect began, when all the disciples were living in Pella after they moved from Jerusalem, since Christ told them to leave Jerusalem and withdraw because it was about to be besieged. For this reason they settled in Peraea and there, as I said, they lived. This is where the Nazoraean sect began.

Panarion 30:2:7

Their sect began after the capture of Jerusalem. For when all those who believed in Christ settled at that time for the most part in Peraea, in a city called Pella belonging to the Decapolis mentioned in the gospel, which is next to Batanaea and the land of Bashan, then they moved there and stayed...

On Weights and Measures 15

For when the city was about to be captured and sacked by the Romans, all the disciples were warned beforehand by an angel to remove from the city, doomed as it was to utter destruction. On migrating from it they settled at Pella, the town already indicated, across the Jordan. It is said to belong to Decapolis

Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1:39:3

Subsequently also an evident proof of this great mystery is supplied in the

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Capitolina was the name given to Jerusalem by the Romans after the second Jewish revolt in 135 CE. Significantly no Jews were allowed there.] Others, intent on proving that the second century *Jewish Christians* in the Transjordan region (which includes Pella) could not had been descended from the original Church, have taken the opposite position.

<sup>9</sup> The Pseudo-Clementines is a collection of works that was circulated under the name of Clement of Rome (fl c. 96 CE). Works generally grouped under these include the Clementine Homilies, the Clementine Recognitions and two epistles (Peter to James, including James' response and Clement to James) The Pseudo-Clementines are generally dated to the fourth century CE. But it is generally agreed that they used sources dating from earlier centuries. Ferguson (ed), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*: p964

fact, that every one who, believing in this Prophet who had been foretold by Moses, is baptized in His name, shall be kept unhurt from the destruction of war which impends over the unbelieving nation, and the place itself; but that those who do not believe shall be made exiles from their place and kingdom, that even against their will they may understand and obey the will of God.

Various scholars claim to find indirect allusions in the New Testament to the flight from Jerusalem. These include Mark 13:14, 16:7; Matthew 10:23; Luke 21:20 and Revelation 12:6.<sup>10</sup> Some have suggested the witness of the *Toldoth Jeshu*, a fifth century Jewish anti-Christian polemic.<sup>11</sup> While it may be possible that some of these additional sources actually do refer to the flight, they are just too garbled or vague to be used as *proof* that it actually occurred. We will limit our analysis to the traditions recorded by Eusebius, Epiphanius and the anonymous author of the Pseudo-Clementines.

### The Source of the Tradition

First let us look at the patristic evidence. It has been pointed out that the similarities between the words and phrases used between the Epiphanius and Eusebius accounts mean that the former is dependent on the latter as the source of his information. So for citations from the church fathers, we basically have the story as it is given in Eusebius' History of the Church 3:5:3.<sup>12</sup>

So the next question is; where did Eusebius get this information? The most obvious candidate would be, of course, Hegesippus (c110-180). We find that Eusebius quoted Hegesippus for his story on James leadership in the Jerusalem Church (History of the Church 2:23:3) and about the succession of Symeon to that position (History of the Church 4:22:4-5). However Gerd Ludemann had pointed out several strong arguments *against* Hegesippus being the source of the Pella tradition:<sup>13</sup>

- The tradition seems to presuppose the use of Pella as a *permanent* location for the remnants of the Jerusalem Church, not just a place for a temporary stay before returning to Jerusalem.
- Eusebius would normally indicate when he was quoting from Hegesippus. For this passage there was no such specification of Hegesippus as a source.
- Pella was not mentioned in any of the many citations of Hegesippus in *History of the Church* although we would have expected such references.

While these do not prove Hegesippus was not the source, it does make him an unlikely candidate. A possible candidate is Aristo of Pella (fl. c 150 CE). Eusebius mentioned him as a source for his story on the Bar Kochba Revolt (the second Jewish War; 132-135 CE) in History of the Church 4:6:3. Some considerations make him a likely source. He was *from* Pella. He described the second Jewish War, thus it is reasonable to think that he would have mentioned something about the preceding one and, in doing that, would have mentioned the flight to his hometown.<sup>14</sup>

Based on source critical analysis too detailed to go into here, the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1:33-71 is generally recognized to be based on a mid-second century source, also

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<sup>10</sup> Ludemann, *op. cit.*: p206-207

<sup>11</sup> Schonfield, *Saints Against Caesar*: p130-141

<sup>12</sup> Schonfield, *Saints Against Caesar*: p130-141

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*:204-205

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*:205-206

probably based east of the Jordan river.<sup>15</sup> Whether it was based in Pella, as suggested by Gerd Ludemann, is not conclusive. So it may be a source that is independent to the one used by Eusebius, or it may not. For the purposes of our analysis we will take the conservative stance and assume that it *did* have the same source (Aristo of Pella).

What does all this analysis show us? I think we can have some confidence in the source.<sup>16</sup>The reasons are as follows:

- Only the *Jewish Christians* would have an interest in preserving traditions relating to their ancestry from Jerusalem. Yet we know from Epiphanius (Panarion 29:7:7, 30:18:1) that Jewish Christian groups (Nazarenes and Ebionites) lived not only in Pella but the whole strip from Syria in the North through Peneas, Cochaba in Batanaea/Bashan, Pella and the surrounding region around Decapolis and finally to Moab and Nabatea in the South. [See the map below] Thus there were many locations that would had had the incentive to call themselves the final home of the Jerusalem Church. Yet there was no competing tradition from other Jewish Christian locations.<sup>17</sup>
- Thus the timing of the source (circa 150 CE), although admittedly rather late, actually goes some way towards strengthening the conclusion that the Pella immigration was historical, for there was certainly ample time for rival traditions to be brought forward if the Jewish Christian communities in the Transjordan did not feel the story of the Pella flight had merit. And certainly had Epiphanius or Eusebius been aware of conflicting traditions they would have been more than happy to include in their works as just another example of the deceit practiced by the heretics. That the single tradition is so firmly entrenched means that the tradition, when it was told by Aristo of Pella around 150 CE had already attained the status of a strong unchallenged tradition.
- There is not necessarily a conflict between this tradition and that of Hegesippus, who had fourteen Jewish Jerusalem "bishops" after James. As Ray Pritz pointed out, it is possible for a group to keep the name of its original location in its title although they may no longer be based there (citing Gibbons *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*); e.g. the Patriarch of *Alexandria* kept his title although he had long ago moved to *Cairo*, the "Roman pontiffs" stayed in *Avignon*, France for seventy years. The prestige of Jerusalem among the Jewish Christians would have certainly made them kept the title related to the city somehow,<sup>18</sup> even though they were then residing in Pella.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the relative lateness of the source and the presence of ostensibly conflicting traditions do not cast a fatal blow to the reliability of the tradition. The absence of any conflicting tradition is a strong indication of the historicity of the tradition.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*:182

<sup>16</sup> Gerd Ludemann, (*ibid.*:209-211 )whose analysis I had followed closely actually came to the opposite conclusion; i.e. that the sources are not reliable. His reasons are:

- The evidence is scarce and limited only to the region from Pella.
- The sources are relatively late.
- There is conflict with other evidence-by which he meant that the detail about the successors of James returning to Jerusalem as "bishops" conflict with the Pella tradition of permanent residence there.

<sup>17</sup> This includes the Cochaba tradition mentioned above. For that tradition if historical merely speaks about the migration of some of the *desposynoi* from Nazareth to Cochaba but does not necessarily conflict with the migration tradition from Jerusalem to Pella.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, the title "bishop" is in itself anachronistic. The titles were probably given retroactively by the Jewish Christians. The point is that they would have retained the connection with Jerusalem, whatever they called them.

<sup>19</sup> Pritz, Nazarene Jewish Christianity: p123

## Plausibility of the Flight

The argument about the implausible conditions for the flight, first proposed by S.G.F. Brandon in *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (1957), has been influential in causing many scholars to abandon the historicity of the Pella tradition. Brandon pointed out three (in his opinion insurmountable) difficulties:<sup>20</sup>

- **The difficulty in the choice of Pella as the final destination.**

According to Brandon, Pella was a Gentile city and on *a priori* grounds an improbable selection for pious Jews. Furthermore Jewish insurgents attacked Pella and other surrounding cities as revenge for the Gentile massacre of Jews in Caesarea in 66 CE (Jewish War 2:18:1). Eusebius said that the Jerusalem church left the city "before the war". This could mean one of two dates: before the failed expedition of Cestius Gallus in 66 CE or before the campaign of Vespasian in 67 CE. Thus had the Jerusalem group left before Gallus's expedition and arrived *before* the aforementioned Jewish attack on Pella they would have been killed in this massacre by the marauding Jews. If they had arrived *after* the attack, before the Vespasian campaign, the surviving Gentile inhabitants of Pella would have taken revenge on them.

- **The difficulty of actually leaving Jerusalem.**

If the members of the Jerusalem church had tried to leave after the failed expedition of Gallus, the trek would have been mortally dangerous. For the locations outside Jerusalem would have been patrolled by the Jewish revolutionaries. We know from Josephus that they did not treat deserters kindly—they slit their *throats* (Jewish War 5:10:1). If they had left later, during the final siege of Titus in spring of 70 CE, the same territory around Jerusalem would have been controlled by Roman soldiers and their auxiliaries. And these, just like the insurgents, did not have much compassion for Jewish deserters—they slit their *bellies*. (Jewish War 5:13:4-5).

- **Lack of Any Evidence of the Influence of the Pella Church**

Finally, Brandon argued, why was there no sign of any continuing influence of the community in the Christian church after the war; during the (remainder of) first and second centuries CE. This is surprising in view of the obviously unchallenged prestige of the Jerusalem church headed by James.

Brandon added that the Jewish Christians known to be in Pella from early in the second century must have been refugees *Galilee* ("since it was closer to Pella than from Jerusalem") who fled there during "the suppression of the revolt, or shortly after." It was these Jewish Christians who concocted the Pella tradition as a foundation legend for their congregation. However there are several serious flaws in Brandon's analysis; as we shall see below:

- **Pella**

It should be noted that there is a discrepancy in Brandon's analysis here. He claimed that the Pella's tradition arose because of Jewish Christians who came to Pella after escaping

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<sup>20</sup> Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*: p168-173



from *Galilee*, since this was "much closer to Pella than was Jerusalem".<sup>21</sup> Yet this contradicts one of his major arguments, that Pella would not have been a safe refuge for *any* group of Jews. (See his argument above) If it was possible for Galilean Jewish Christians to settle in Pella, it would also be possible for Jerusalem Jewish Christians.

Brandon's argument on the inhospitality of Pella was based on a single passage in Josephus' Jewish War 2:18:1<sup>22</sup> which mentioned that the Jews "sacked" cities such as Gerasa, Pella and Scythopolis. It is unclear whether "sacked" implies complete devastation or something less. We do not know whether the devastation inflicted on all these cities were the same. However, we do know that the reaction from the Gentiles in these cities were *not* uniformly violent. While many cities, such as Scythopolis, certainly did take out their revenge against Jews (see Jewish War 2:18:4-5), others such as Gerasa (Jewish War 2:18:5) did not harm the Jews that stayed with them. The reaction of the inhabitants of Pella was not specifically mentioned by Josephus.<sup>23</sup>

- **Escaping from Jerusalem**

Although it was true that leaving Jerusalem during those times from 66-70 CE would have been extremely dangerous, it was by no means impossible. Indeed we find Josephus recounting, on quite a few occasions, the escape of many Jews from Jerusalem during that time. As we can see from some of the excerpts below,<sup>24</sup> many of the Jews were able

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*: p172-173

<sup>22</sup> Josephus 2:18:1 Upon which stroke that the Jews received at Caesarea, the whole nation was greatly enraged; so they divided themselves into several parties, and laid waste the villages of the Syrians, and their neighboring cities, Philadelphia, and Sebonitis, and Gerasa, and *Pella*, and Scythopolis, and after them Gadara, and Hippos; and falling upon Gaulonitis, some cities they destroyed there, and some they set on fire, and then went to Kedasa, belonging to the Tyrians, and to Ptolemais, and to Gaba, and to Cesarea; nor was either Sebaste [Samaria] or Askelon able to oppose the violence with which they were attacked; and when they had burnt these to the ground; they entirely demolished Anthedon and Gaza; many also of the villages that were about every one of those cities were plundered, and an immense slaughter was made of the men who were caught in them.

<sup>23</sup> Pritz, *op cit.*: p124-125

<sup>24</sup> Some of the examples of people escaping from Jerusalem in the period 66-70 given in Josephus' Jewish War are:

- **[c. November 66]**

Jewish War 2:20:1

After this calamity had befallen Cestius, *many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city...*

- **[c. Winter 67/68 before Passover]**

Jewish War 4:6:1

The Idumeans complied with these persuasions; and, in the first place, they set those that were in the prisons at liberty, being about *two thousand of the populace, who thereupon fled away immediately to Simon*

Jewish War : 4:7:3

These things were told Vespasian by deserters; for although the seditious watched all the passages out of the city, and destroyed all, whosoever they were, that came thither, *yet were there some that had concealed themselves, and when they had fled to the Romans, ... Vespasian did indeed already pity the calamities these men were in...*

- **[c. June 70]**

Jewish War 5:10:1

As Josephus was speaking thus with a loud voice, the seditious would neither yield to what he said, nor did they deem it safe for them to alter their conduct; but as for the people, they had a great inclination to desert to the Romans; accordingly, some of them sold what they had, and even the most precious things that had been laid up as treasures by them, for every small matter, and swallowed down pieces of gold, that they might not be found out by the robbers; and *when they had escaped to the Romans, went to stool, and had wherewithal to provide plentifully for themselves; for Titus let a great number of them go away into the country, whither they pleased.*

Jewish War 5:13:4

Hereupon some of the deserters, having no other way, leaped down from the wall immediately, while *others*

to flee the city right up till the end. Of course many of those who escaped died either from famine, from over-eating(!) from the food supplied by the Romans, or slaughtered by the Jewish insurgents or Roman auxiliaries looking for gold in their bellies. But by no means did the accounts by Josephus show that *all* who managed to leave died. As we can see from the excerpt below, on one occasion as many as 2000 people escaped (Jewish War 4:6:1). Difficult as it may be it certainly was "do-able" as Josephus reminds us.<sup>25</sup> However we would not expect that the *whole* congregation from Jerusalem managed to get away. As Josephus' writings had shown, many would have died trying to break out and, from what we can see from the devoutness of the Jerusalem church to their ancestral religion, many may have chosen to stay back (and perhaps fight). Thus we do not expect the number of escapees to be very large.

- **Influence of the Pella Church**

It is certainly extremely likely, whatever the size of the band of Jerusalem Christians that managed to escape to Pella, they must have been in a pretty destitute state. It is unlikely that they would be able to assert any authority on the whole church so soon after the war. Furthermore, the fact that they *had* escaped to Pella may not be well known to the church at large, thus asserting any authority by sending emissaries would be quite difficult. Thus given time the Gentile Church evolved their own version of Christianity which eventually did away with the influence of the original Jerusalem church in Pella.

Additionally, it should be noted that Pella *did* have some influence on the development of *Jewish Christianity*, since, as we have noted above, it is probable that the source document for the Pseudo-Clementines came from there.

As for Brandon's remark that the Pella tradition functioned as a foundation legend for the growing Jewish Christian community there, the simplest retort is that by Robert M. Price in his book *Deconstructing Jesus*: "Right enough, but this needn't mean they did not actually make such an exodus".<sup>26</sup>

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*of them went out of the city with stones, as if they would fight them; but thereupon they fled away to the Romans. But here a worse fate accompanied these than what they had found within the city; and they met with a quicker dispatch from the too great abundance they had among the Romans, than they could have done from the famine among the Jews; for when they came first to the Romans, they were puffed up by the famine, and swelled like men in a dropsy; after which they all on the sudden overfilled those bodies that were before empty, and so burst asunder, excepting such only as were skillful enough to restrain their appetites, and by degrees took in their food into bodies unaccustomed thereto.*

- **[August 70 CE]**

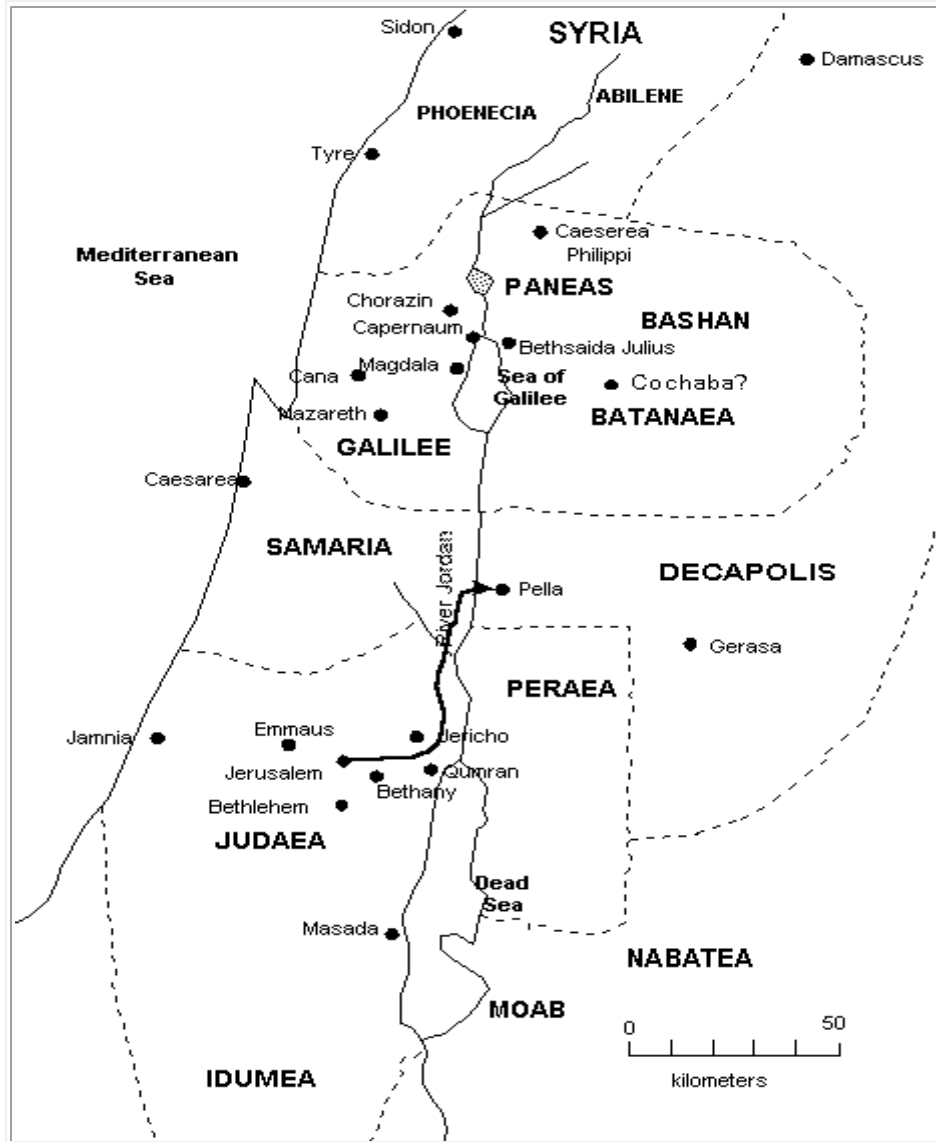
Jewish War 6:2:2

As Josephus spoke these words, with groans and tears in his eyes, his voice was intercepted by sobs. However, the Romans could not but pity the affliction he was under, and wonder at his conduct. But for John, and those that were with him, they were but the more exasperated against the Romans on this account, and were desirous to get Josephus also into their power: yet did that discourse influence a great many of the better sort; and truly some of them were so afraid of the guards set by the seditious, that they tarried where they were, but still were satisfied that both they and the city were doomed to destruction.

*Some also there were who, watching a proper opportunity when they might quietly get away, fled to the Romans, of whom were the high priests Joseph and Jesus, and of the sons of high priests three, whose father was Ishmael, who was beheaded in Cyrene, and four sons of Matthias, as also one son of the other Matthias, who ran away after his father's death, and whose father was slain by Simon the son of Gioras, with three of his sons, as I have already related; many also of the other nobility went over to the Romans, together with the high priests.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*: p126

<sup>26</sup> Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*: p109



Map showing a possible escape route.

## Discussion and Conclusion

We have done a pretty in-depth survey of the Pella tradition. Arguments against historicity include the relative lateness of the source (circa 150 CE) and the implausibility of the scenario of escape from Jerusalem and into Pella.

However we have seen that these objections are not necessarily fatal to the tradition. The unchallenged position of the story of the Pella immigration (even after taking into account a parallel Cochaba tradition) provides confidence that it attained its status as a strong tradition early—certainly earlier than the source used by Eusebius and (probably) the author of the Pseudoclementines.

The implausibility argument by Brandon is not as formidable as it first appears and contains within it certain contradictions. Certainly if Galilean Jewish Christians could settle in Pella during that time (as Brandon himself conceded), so too could Jerusalem Jewish Christians. Conditions in Pella may or may not be as bad as in some of the other cities—since we have Josephus' report that the Jews in a few (albeit a minority) of the cities were left more or less unmolested despite the recent sacking there by Jewish insurgents. The loss of influence of the Jerusalem church is indeed to be expected from the circumstances of the escape and not something in need of an explanation.

Finally we note that the parallel Cochaba tradition, which probably states that some of Jesus' relatives escaped from Nazareth to the town in Bashan/Batanaea during the Jewish War, does not contradict the Pella flight and may even supplement it. In other words during the time when Symeon was leading the Jerusalem Nazarenes out to Pella, some of Jesus' *other* relatives were doing the same out of Nazareth. The presence of these two traditions point to the fact that many Jewish Christians fled to the east of the Jordan River during the war.

**In conclusion, the balance of evidence favours the historicity of the Pella tradition.**

The following section, including sources is reproduced (with minor cosmetic adjustments) from the 2008 article (draft version) by Glenn Miller at the Christian Thinktank: Did the Jewish War eliminate all the possible counter-witnesses to the life of Jesus in the NT? <sup>27</sup>

## The Aftermath of the first Revolt (70 CE)

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<sup>27</sup> <http://christianthinktank.com/muddleplatonismx3.html> [accessed April 2017]

Consider this summary statement by Levine:

“Nevertheless, it is easy to overstate the effects of the year 70. Contrary to popular opinion, the exile did not commence in that year—most Jews were already living in the Diaspora before the destruction—nor did the year 70 signal the loss of Jewish independence. In reality, Judea had been conquered 130 years earlier by Pompey in 63 B.C.E. Although much autonomy had been granted to Herod (37-4 B.C.E.), it had already been greatly curtailed following Judea's annexation as a Roman province in 6 C.E. ... Moreover, the continuum between the pre-70 and post-70 periods was maintained by the ongoing rule of Rome; culturally, economically and even socially much of Jewish life was not seriously interrupted between the pre- and post-destruction era. Indeed, large parts of the Jewish people were unaffected or only marginally affected by the revolt and its aftermath. Few Jewish communities in the Galilee were destroyed—Jotapata and Gamla were the exceptions. The Roman military march had little, if any, effect on the large Jewish settlement in Perea east of the Jordan, on the communities along the coastal plain or even on many areas in Judea itself. Thus, beyond Jerusalem and some parts of Judea, the upheavals of the First Revolt were not all that widespread, either demographically or economically.”<sup>28</sup>

And Schwartz:

“For many, or even most, Palestinian Jews, especially those outside Judaea proper, the revolts had caused less drastic disruptions. Here the main changes, aside from an influx of Judaeans of unknown extent, were produced by the collapse of the central institutions—no more pilgrimages, no enforced deference to representatives of the Temple and Torah, no obligatory gifts to the priests.”<sup>29</sup>

The First Jewish War was devastating for Jerusalem and parts of Judea, but not for Galilee. Similarly, the Bar Kochba Revolt (131-135), which resulted in the expulsion of Jews and Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, but had no impact on Galilee. The Galileans neither participated nor were affected by it (except for the migration of rich and/or learned Judeans to Galilee which followed).

“Galilee scarcely took part in the Bar Kochba revolt of a.d. 131 to 135. Bar Kochba (see Simon bar Kosiba) tried to involve the Galileans, but perhaps the memories of a.d. 66 to 70 burned too brightly. Galilee seems to have mainly stayed quiet, although tunnels in

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<sup>28</sup> Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development, Hershel Shanks (ed.), Biblical Archeology Society: 1992, 126 f

<sup>29</sup> Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 bce to 640 ce. Seth Schwartz. Princeton:2001,110

which Jews hid during the revolt have been discovered. It was after the revolt, perhaps after a.d. 160, that Sepphoris became known by its Greek name, Diocaesarea”.<sup>30</sup>

“No texts, coins, or archaeological excavations indicate that Galilee was involved in the second great Judean revolt against Roman rule, the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-135. The extensive disruption and devastation were confined to Judea. Following the first revolt, however, Roman military presence increased in the area, as did the economic burdens that entailed.... The major impact of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and Judea came after the Bar Kokhba Revolt with the migration of prominent Judean families to Galilee and the resulting development of rabbinic academies in Sepphoris and Tiberias. Indeed, by late antiquity, Galilee and Tiberias in particular had become perhaps the most important centers of nascent rabbinic Judaism, with influence reaching far and wide in the Roman empire and into the Babylonian Jewish communities.... After the further Roman devastation of Judea in suppressing the Bar Kokhba Revolt, many of the sages moved to Galilee, establishing academies first in Usha and Beth Shearim and then in Sepphoris.”<sup>31</sup>

“Why Galilee, so far as we know, had played no significant part in the Bar Kochba revolt, and why the Jewish villages of the former Idumaeon zone play only a small role in rabbinic literature, it is not possible to say. ...”<sup>32</sup>

“Until relatively recently, scholars have assumed that the entire province of Judea and most Jews living there were mobilized and actively supported the Bar-Kokhba revolt. This view is based on highly exaggerated accounts that magnified the suffering, tragedy and loss of life during the revolt. Later rabbinic tradition adopted a generally critical attitude toward Bar-Kokhba—referring to him as Bar Kosba (Son of Lies); it sought to discredit him and to demonstrate the futility of armed rebellion. Similarly, the Church Fathers saw the Bar-Kokhba revolt as a futile attempt to restore the Jewish independence that had been taken away by God as punishment for the Jews' denial of Jesus. Even the Roman historian Dio Cassius greatly exaggerated the scope of the violence, thereby enhancing the significance of the Roman victory; he speaks of the destruction of some 50 fortifications and 985 villages and the loss of 585,000 lives!

All these claims notwithstanding, there is practically no description of hostilities except in southern Judea (the biblical area of Judah). The archaeological material clearly

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<sup>30</sup> Dictionary of New Testament Background. Craig Evans and Stanley Porter (eds). IVP: 2000. [Fourth in the Dictionary series]

<sup>31</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996,38-40

<sup>32</sup> The Roman Near East: 31BC - AD337, Fergus Millar, Harvard: 1993,349-50

corroborates this picture. All remains of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, whether coins, caves of refuge, papyri or fortifications, have been found in that region. The Galilee, the second major area of Jewish population at the time, remained virtually untouched by the devastation of the revolt and thus was able to assume a position of leadership as it absorbed refugees from the southern part of the country after the hostilities ended.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Events and Damages of the First Jewish War on Galilee (ca.70)**

We should note at the outset that there were two historical accounts of the Jewish War written: one by Josephus and one by his political rival Justus of Tiberias. The one by Justus is only known through Josephus’ unflattering remarks about his rival’s account, so we don’t have it to use. References to the Jewish war in classical historians are summaries mostly (e.g., Tacitus) and coins commemorating the War give precious little data. With this in mind, we have to recognize—with most historians—the ‘exaggerated’ accounts of Josephus, with regard to his personal ‘importance’ in the war and with regard to (alternately) the brutality and the clemency of the Roman military leaders! In our data quotes, we will see very strong statements by scholars on his exaggeration, while most will give *some* credence to the basic *outlines* of his story. Most of the time, it seems like Josephus is inflating his numbers *by an order of magnitude*:

“The first impression we have, once we recognize that Josephus's accounts of the Galilean phase of the Jewish War constitute one long self-glorification of his own exploits as the great Jewish general worthy of engaging in war with the future emperor Vespasian, is that there was not much of a war... Again, while we cannot trust the details, including the exaggerated numbers, we must take seriously the basics of his account of Japha's resistance to the Roman reconquest (*BJ.* 3.289-306; he even gives the date, 13 July 67). That is, persisting in their insurrection, the villagers offered stiff resistance to the Roman troops, the "women as well as the able-bodied men doing whatever they could to fight back. In reaction to such resistance the angered Roman commanders became all the more vicious in retaliation. As Josephus reports, virtually the whole population (thousands, but not 15,000) was massacred.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Levine in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, Hershel Shanks (ed.), Biblical Archeology Society: 1992,141f

<sup>34</sup> *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis*, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996, 127-130

Galilee seems relatively passive, and the majority of natives seem uninterested in the war at all. There are very few actual battles described—but lots of fleeing and hiding... Summary accounts in the secondary literature typically only mention/describe a couple of battles, with most of the large cities only marginally involved/affected.

“During the first revolt Galilee formed one military command under the leadership of the general Josephus, later known as a historian. Vespasian, the Roman commander sent by the emperor Nero, marched south from Tyre to Acco-Ptolemais and set up a headquarters. From there he routed any Jewish defenders in Galilee on his way eastward to Sepphoris. The city fathers of Sepphoris met him in the field and declared their loyalty to Rome and their abhorrence of the revolt, petitioning Vespasian for a garrison to protect them from their more warlike neighbors (Josephus J.W. 3.2.4 §§30–34; Life 74 §411). Josephus and the few defenders he could gather entered Jotapata in the mountains about 10 miles north of Sepphoris. Vespasian besieged the city for forty-seven days, then took it in a fearsome slaughter. He discovered Josephus, arrested him and saved him for later. After the surrender of Tiberias and the defeat of the Jewish rebels in a pitched battle on the Sea of Galilee, Vespasian had secured Galilee and needed only to march to Jerusalem to prosecute the siege there and finally at Masada.”<sup>35</sup>

“In the spring of 67 the Roman general Vespasian, sent by Nero, and his son Titus arrived with an army of nearly 60,000 men (J.W. 3.4.2 §69). Using friendly Sepphoris as a base in Galilee, Vespasian encountered little resistance in that district except from the fortified places where most of the resistance had moved. His first sustained opposition came from the hilltop fortress Jotapata under Josephus’ command. After a seven-week siege it fell in July 67 (J.W. 3.7.5–31 §§150–288; 3.7.33–36 §§316–39). Josephus surrendered and was taken prisoner (J.W. 3.8.8 §392; cf. 4.10.7 §§622–29). Then the Roman forces took the port of Joppa (J.W. 3.9.7–8 §§445–61) in late July to protect the supply routes, Tiberias in August (J.W. 3.9.2–4 §§414–31), Tarichaeae in September (J.W. 3.10.1–5 §§462–502), the fortress of Gamala in October after a four-week siege (J.W. 4.1.3–7 §§11–53; 4.1.9–10 §§62–83) and finally Gischala. There the rebel leader John of Gischala escaped for Jerusalem with his band of followers (J.W. 4.2.1–5 §§84–120). Having subdued the district of Galilee, Vespasian set up garrisons throughout the area during the winter months to maintain control.

“Once Sepphoris received him with open arms the other cities also remained quiet, and Caesennius’ only engagement was against ‘all the rebels and brigands’ (...) who had fled to an unidentified mountain near Sepphoris called Asamon, and more than 2000 of these perished. The account of this excursion of Roman troops into Galilee concludes: ‘Gallus, seeing no further signs of revolt in Galilee returned with his troops to Caesarea’ and Cestius was able to continue his march on Jerusalem (War 2.-510-13).

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<sup>35</sup> Dictionary of New Testament Background. Craig Evans and Stanley Porter (eds). IVP: 2000; note only two real battles mentioned: Jotapata and something on the Sea of Galilee



“In assessing the situation in Galilee up to this point, therefore, one can only be struck by the relative passivity of the area. At least the indications are that it did not cause the Romans any undue anxiety. Strategically, it was unlikely that Cestius would march south, and more especially on Jerusalem itself without making his presence felt in Galilee also, since as we have seen, it was always the first objective of armies invading from the north. Even after Cestius' defeat and withdrawal there does not appear to be any immediate worsening of the situation, for Josephus recounts his own involvement with another of Cestius' generals, Placidus, again in the region of Chabulon, who had been sent 'with two cohorts of infantry and a squadron of horse to burn the Galilean villages in the neighborhood of Ptolemais'. However, both sides seem to be prepared to play a 'wait-and-see' game, and the impression one gets is that Josephus is more concerned about his Jewish enemies than his Roman foes (Life 213-215)”<sup>36</sup>

“When the Romans finally launched their massive expedition to reconquer greater Judea in 67, starting as usual with Galilee, they met with little resistance. For all of the pages the great general Josephus writes about his own supposedly brilliant preparations for and strategy in battle against the Romans, he cites precious few incidents of actually engaging in combat. The one major exception is Jotapata. Of all the sites he claims to have fortified, this one now has at least some credibility. It has finally been excavated. The Romans did indeed besiege and destroy this town, although the scale of the conflict was nowhere near what Josephus claims. In the midst of the battle, of course, Josephus found a way of deserting to the Romans and thereafter assisted the enemy in reconquering the land and people. The other principal resistance came in Upper Galilee, at the refortified village of Gischala.”<sup>37</sup>

The Roman army DID use their standard 'terrify through pillage' ('scorched earth' approach, selectively applied) tactics in the countryside (and *ad hoc* strongholds), but the actual depopulation effect (of Jewish Galileans—possible witnesses/objectors) was minimal, because the Galileans were smart enough to flee!! Most of the villages Josephus says they plundered, pillaged, or burned, were empty of people when they got there—even if the Roman army had intended to kill the economic base of the country.

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<sup>36</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 80f; note—the 'burning' didn't happen; they played 'wait and see' instead

<sup>37</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996. 38-40; note: after this quote, Horsley takes Josephus' statement that the Romans enslaved 'tens of thousands' at face value—which is not at all consistent with how he treats other numbers in *BJ*...

“Vespasian recognized that Sepphoris afforded an excellent springboard from which he could control the whole of Lower Galilee (War 3:30.34), and so the tribune Placidus is stationed there with 1,000 cavalry and 6,000 infantry as reinforcement for the garrison already sent by Cestius (Life 394; cf. War 2:510). This force was adequate to overrun the surrounding countryside. Josephus' 'army' was not able to take the city which he himself had so strongly fortified as to render it practically impregnable! The Romans adopted a scorched earth policy: 'they never ceased, night or day, to devastate the plains and to pillage the property of the country folk, killing those who might be able to carry arms, and reducing the weak to slavery' (War 3:59-63.110f). This seems an altogether likely tactic if Galilee was as thickly populated as Josephus reports. He prides himself on the fortresses he had provided as the only source of refuge for the country folk, and while we have already voiced certain misgivings about the list, undoubtedly there must have been great numbers of refugees leaving the villages and attempting to dig themselves in in the more easily defended centers. Vespasian's first arrival in Galilee is told as though it were a triumphal journey already. As he proceeded from Ptolemais to the borders of Galilee, Josephus' army deserted before even catching sight of the enemy. They fled from the camp at Garis near Sepphoris, willing to capitulate, and Josephus himself retired to Tiberias with a few loyal supporters (War 3:127-31). Vespasian was not about to expose his troops to possible attacks in the open country after Cestius' defeat, so instead he turned north-west to Gabara (one of the three largest cities in Galilee), and though there was no resistance there he slaughtered all the inhabitants of age, and burned all the small towns and villages in the neighborhood, finding some completely deserted and reducing the inhabitants of others to slavery (War 3:132-4).”<sup>38</sup>

“The peasants in Chabulon and neighboring villages bore the brunt of the Roman attempt to intimidate the Galileans and of the first assaults in the Roman campaign of reconquest (*B.J.* 2.503-5; *Vita* 213-14). Situated along the frontier with Ptolemais, Chabulon had houses of the same style as those in the Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Berytus. The villagers having fled, the Roman troops pillaged and burned Chabulon and the other villages near the frontier. ... Galilean villagers, however, were not suicidal. Faced with the overwhelming might of the Roman army in the open country or in indefensible villages (as at the village of Garis, near Sepphoris, *B.J.* 3.129), they usually fled to what seemed more defensible sites.”<sup>39</sup>

“1. (132) So Vespasian marched to the city **Gabara**, and took it upon the first onset, because he **found it destitute of any considerable number of men** grown up and fit for war. (133) He came then into it, and slew all the youth, the Romans having no mercy on any age whatsoever; and this was done out of the hatred they bore the nation, and because of the iniquity they had been guilty of in the affair of Cestius. (134) He also set **fire**, not only to the city itself, but to all the **villas** and **small cities** that were round about it; some of them were **quite destitute of inhabitants**; and out of **some** of them he carried the inhabitants as **slaves** into captivity.” (*Wars* 3.131-134).

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<sup>38</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 84-86

<sup>39</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996, 127-130

Indeed, the major/large cities of the region were spared much of the possible damage and loss of life. The *native* Galilean folk were almost universally ‘spared’, while the minority rebels and foreigners bore the brunt of Roman fury. Let’s look at the major cities/towns of the area and see how many of them were depopulated and/or abused. The major cities of Lower Galilee were: Sepphoris, Tiberias, Tarichaeae, Gamala (in Gaulan), Jotapata, Gabara, and perhaps the fortresses of Gishala (Upper Galilee) and Itabyrion (at the base of Mt. Tabor).

**Sepphoris.** We have already noted that they actually fared well in this deal. After the war their administrative power was actually increased. The large influx of people from the south (and villagers from the surrounding areas looking for protection from Rome) increased their economic base.

**Tiberias.** Tiberias actually was under the jurisdiction of Agrippa, and was not really Vespasian’s ‘responsibility’. It was actually pro-Roman, but some rebels virtually forced them to resist the Romans. The Romans, however, understood the situation, so when the city was eventually captured, only the outsiders/Greeks were killed/enslaved. The city was not even plundered.

“First Tiberias and then Tarichaeae had revolted at the instigation of Jesus son of Sapphias, and Vespasian 'wishing to repay his hospitality' decided to restore both cities to their allegiance to the king (...). In other words, **Vespasian did not consider these cities his personal responsibility, and obviously he does not regard the disturbances in either as the continuation of the struggle that he had completed at Jotapata. Once Jesus and his followers left Tiberias the peace party there quickly prevailed and there were no undue reprisals on the part of the Romans (War 3:453-61).**”<sup>40</sup>

“Yet despite this influential group in Tiberias the facts are that the city did revolt eventually, and paid a certain price for its behaviour. The (minority) Greek population was massacred, and Herod’s palace burned down... Through the mediation of the elders the Romans were received by the people at large as saviours, and Vespasian forbade any looting by his soldiers, merely destroying one section of the wall (War 3:445-61).”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 84-86

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 131- 132

**Tarichaeae.** This town also offered resistance, but received a similar result:

“At Tarichaeae matters were slightly different. It had accepted Josephus' position in the earlier period, and stood solidly behind him in his dealings with Tiberias - possibly because of jealousy towards its more prominent neighbor (Life 158f. 174.276.304.404). It seems that the city was an accepted refugee center (...) for people from the countryside despite the obvious exaggeration of *Life* 142, which speaks of vast numbers having come there to throw in their lot with Josephus. Presumably, these earlier refugees were from Agrippa's territory or from the Syrian cities in the Dekapolis (War 3:541f), but these would now be joined by people from Galilee, who were on good terms with the city and its inhabitants (cf. Life 981. 304-6). In view of the earlier attitudes it seems a little surprising to hear that after a preliminary skirmish 'the native population, intent on their property and their city, had from the first disapproved of the war, and were now more opposed to it than ever' (War 3:492f). Yet there is nothing inconceivable about such a change in the light of the Roman presence and apparently they recognize the difference in their handling of the affair, by separating the aliens and selling them into slavery while the natives were left unmolested (War 3:532-42).”<sup>42</sup>

“Though Tiberias and Tarichaeae were in rebel hands, pro-Roman feeling was known to be strong in Tiberias and Vespasian could hope to recover that city for his ally Agrippa without difficulty. In August he reassembled his three legions at the loyal city of Sepphoris and advanced on Tiberias, which opened its gates at the mere threat of force and welcomed the Romans as saviours and benefactors, while the rebels, after offering token defiance, made good their escape to Tarichaeae. There the war-party was stronger even before it was stiffened by the refugees from Tiberias, but the city's resistance was brief; the rebel army was defeated, and when dissension then broke out, the Romans took advantage of it to enter the city from its unwallled side facing the Sea of Galilee. Vespasian recognized the distinction between citizens of Tarichaeae, Agrippa's subjects, who had been caught up in the war involuntarily and were now handed back with their city to the king, and non-resident insurgents, who were massacred or sold as slaves, with the exception of six thousand who were shipped to Greece to work on Nero's Corinthian canal.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 84-86

<sup>43</sup> *The Jews under Roman Rule, From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations*. E. Mary Smallwood. Brill:2001,309

**Gamala (in Gaulan).** According to Josephus, many of the able-bodied people fled the town during the siege (War, 4.52f, 63f), and he states that *more* committed suicide *than* were killed by the Romans (4.80ff). The Romans are described here as killing all the remaining inhabitants except for two women.

**Jotapata.** This, as has been noted, was the only significant battle in the war. In this case, Josephus was one of the only two survivors (who broke a suicide pact). Most of the rebel forces were concentrated here, in an act of desperation. Presumably, all were killed. [Josephus gives the number of slain at 40,000—which, when you divide by 10 (smile), gives about 4,000 casualties. [“The one major exception is Jotapata. Of all the sites he claims to have fortified, this one now has at least some credibility. It has finally been excavated. The Romans did indeed besiege and destroy this town, although the scale of the conflict was nowhere near what Josephus claims.”<sup>44</sup>

**Gabara.** We have already seen how this town *was* ravaged, but also that many (most?) of the inhabitants had already fled.

**Gishala (Upper Galilee).** This was actually a fortress imposed by John on the unwilling townspeople. In any event, the people were spared, once John had escaped.

“One final phase of the Galilean campaign remained, the reduction of various 'strongholds' throughout the country. Most of them 'surrendered' as soon as Jotapata had fallen, Josephus admits (War 4:1); only Gischala and Itabyrion remained and the narration of these events allows him to honor Titus, Vespian's son who reduced Gischala. It is difficult to estimate the proper extent of either operation, given the highly anti-John polemic of the War account, and the fact that the description of the size and quality of the Itabyrion fortress is blatant exaggeration, presumably to extol his own achievements. It is noteworthy that John did not appear at any of the lower Galilean centers to aid his fellow countrymen in their hour of need. Of course, his absence may be explained by the antipathy that had grown up between himself and Josephus and the failure of the Jerusalem delegation to unseat his great rival. Even so, it is unlikely that John would have openly revolted after the treatment meted out to Lower Galilee by the Romans. John would be known to them as a potential threat to peace in the north, since his attack on the imperial granaries (Life 71), and so it was decided to bring him to heel before turning all the attention to the south. The sequel paints John as a traitor to his fellow townsmen fleeing by night to Jerusalem with some followers, whereas Titus, sated with bloodshed, spared the masses with typical Flavian sympathy (War 4:92-120). The probabilities are that capture of John rather than the rebelliousness of the people (cf. War 4:102) was the real purpose of 'Titus' mission, and therefore no drastic measures were taken”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee—the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996, 38-40 Miller arrives at the ‘divide by 10’ factor by calculating the amount of exaggeration that appears in Josephus’ description of the height of Mount Tabor, in IV.54ff. He gives the ‘absurdly inaccurate’ (Loeb footnote term) height of 19,800 feet, when the actual height is 1,843 feet above the plain... a factor of ten.

<sup>45</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 87-88

***Itabyrion (fortress)***. Same as Gishala—natives spared.

“**Itabyrion**, which bordered on the Great Plain, might well have been a center of some resistance, for it was in this very neighborhood that the highwaymen of Dabaritta had waylaid Herod's steward's wife early in Josephus' command (Life 126; War 2:595ff). However, as noted, the area of the enclosed rampart is impossible, and this reduces the vast multitude considerably. Presumably some did escape to Jerusalem, there to join (?) John and the 2,000 Tiberians who are also supposed to have fled to the capital (Life 354). However, their numbers must have been small since 600 calvary had been sent against them by the Romans, and again the natives were left unmolested as at Tarichaeae and Gischala.”<sup>46</sup>

So, the two largest cities were spared altogether (Sepphoris and Tiberias), and several of the others were dealt with mildly. Two seem to have been completely annihilated (probably due to the amount of investment that was required to subdue them)—Jotapata and Gamala.

**Summary:** The depopulation of the Galilee is nowhere near ‘catastrophic’, and even the devastation of select villages is relatively contained. The major urban centres fared very well, and the native Jewish Galilean population (except for the rebels) maintained their property and means of livelihood. The migration of peoples into the area (see below) would have actually *added* to the economic base of the region. People who lived there before the War – and perhaps witnessed the ministry of Jesus and knew His family and friends—probably survived the Galilean part of the War.

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<sup>46</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 87-88

## The situation in the Land between the Jewish War (ca 70 CE) and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (ca 200-230 CE)

Here I want to focus on the evidence for continuity between the pre-War and the post-War settings, and to discuss the nature of the major changes in the area during the post-War and post-Revolt period. To the extent the data suggests *continuity*, to that same extent the likelihood of families and communities having group memories of Jesus' life goes up. First, let's look at the data for change: migration of Judean families into Galilee. There is a fairly strong consensus that many wealthy people (i.e., landed individuals, Priestly families) from Judea and many learned (i.e. scribes, rabbis) people from Judea moved into Galilee. Galilee became the center of Jewish life, and grew strong and prosperous during 70-200AD.

“At the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 the priestly family of Jedaiah settled at Sepphoris. Another twenty-three priestly families settled at other Galilean cities and villages, including Nazareth. ...The Sepphoris of the second century a.d. was a great Jewish intellectual center. It was at Sepphoris that the work of Rab Juda, also known as the Prince, culminated in the compilation of the oral law, or the Mishnah, at the beginning of the third century of the common era.”<sup>47</sup>

“Since Josephus was a general of Jewish forces located in “both Galilees” (BJ ii.20.4 [568]), we could easily lose our objective if we were to track down his many references. Furthermore, for this article it would serve no useful purpose. Suffice it to say that Vespasian quickly conquered Galilee, taking Josephus prisoner in the process. Jotapata, Sepphoris, and Gischala were already important Jewish cities. After the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, the religion of the Jews might have come to an end. But Johanan ben Zakkai escaped from Jerusalem, according to tradition smuggling a copy of the Holy Scriptures with him, and obtained permission from Vespasian to set up an academy at Jabneh (Jamnia, the OT Jabneel in the Sharon plain). He organized a Beth Din to take the place of the Sanhedrin, which had ceased to exist. After the defeat of Bar Cochba in a.d. 135 the council moved to Sikhnin N of Jotapata, and due to the persecution under Hadrian other schools that had developed moved to Galilee, with locations at Usha, Peqi'in, Sepphoris, Beth-shearim, and Tiberias. Galilee thenceforth became a strong center of Judaism. The teachings of the Tannaim were gathered, the codification of the Mishnah was accomplished by Judah ha-Nasi, and the traditional pronunciation of the Hebrew Bible was preserved by the Tiberian masoretic pointing. Thus the foundations of modern Judaism were securely laid — in Galilee of the Gentiles.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Dictionary of New Testament Background. Craig Evans and Stanley Porter (eds). IVP:2000. [Fourth in the Dictionary series]

<sup>48</sup> International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed), Eerdmans: 1979.

“Another fact was also of considerable consequence: after the revolt had been crushed by the Roman legions, Emperor Hadrian issued a decree that made it illegal for all circumcised persons to live in Jerusalem or even to come within sight of the city. Along with their Jewish brethren, the Jewish believers were also affected by this decree. It meant the cessation of the community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, at least for some years. They lost their spiritual headquarters, so to speak. The most influential and oldest community of Jewish believers was dissolved. In their stead, Gentile Christians invaded Jerusalem and established a purely non-Jewish community there.”<sup>49</sup>

“After the failure of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome, the twenty-four “courses” or divisions of priests from the Temple in Jerusalem fled northward. One priestly family by the name of Hapizez (or Hapises) settled in Nazareth (Mishmaroth 18). That Nazareth was the home of a priestly course is repeated in a fragment of a Byzantine period Hebrew inscription, a list of the priestly courses, found at Caesarea in 1962. In the 3d century, Nazareth still had a strong priestly character according to Midr. Qoh. 2.8.”<sup>50</sup>

“...we also find another picture of Sepphoris emerging from the rabbinic sources, namely that of wealthy Jewish landowners dwelling there in the 2nd century C.E. These 'great ones' or 'heads' were the recognized leaders of the Jewish community and acted as judges in their law courts, as well as representing them in the city council which was part-Jewish, part-Gentile, at least after the Bar Cochba revolt and the re-naming of the city as Diocaesarea. The picture which rabbinic sources paint of these great ones and their oppression of their poorer Jewish brothers is not very complimentary, giving rise to the bitter disputes with the Jewish teachers who transferred there after 135 C.E. Presumably this Jewish landed aristocracy can be dated back to the period immediately after the first revolt when, as we have seen, many, especially of the upper classes, fled Jerusalem for safer places like Agrippa's kingdom, and presumably also Sepphoris, which was spared the ravages of the war due to the presence of the Roman garrison which Vespasian had granted them”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity. Oskar Skarsaune. IVP: 2001; Note—there is a tradition that the Christians were forced by the combo of BarKokhba and Hadrian to leave the city and that they fled to Pella, but some (or all) of them could have gone back to Galilee.

<sup>50</sup> Anchor Bible Dictionary, David Noel Freedman (main ed.), DoubleDay:1992

<sup>51</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 126-127



“After the further Roman devastation of Judea in suppressing the Bar Kokhba Revolt, many of the sages moved to Galilee, establishing academies first in Usha and Beth Shearim and then in Sepphoris”.<sup>52</sup>

“As if history were repeating itself, recovery and the reinstatement of Jewish self-government ensued once again. With the accession of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 C.E.), virtually all of Hadrian's decrees were rescinded. The patriarchate and the high court were reconstituted at Usha, in the Galilee. Indeed, the two revolts contributed greatly to encouraging the Jewish population of Palestine to move from Judea to the north, settling primarily in the Galilee. Under Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel II, (first half of the second century c.E.) and later under Rabbi Judah the Prince (latter half of the second and beginning of the third century C.E.), the editor of the Mishnah, the patriarchate and the other institutions of the Jewish community reached their height. Taxes poured into the patriarchal coffers even from the Diaspora, where the emissaries of the rabbis of Palestine attempted to foster the spread of tannaitic Judaism. ...<sup>53</sup>

“Around the beginning of the third century, for reasons long the object of speculation and still unknown, the position of the patriarchs and rabbis began to change—a change most scholars follow rabbinic literature in attributing partly to the activities of the patriarch Judah I. He somehow became a wealthy landowner, well-connected in the increasingly prosperous Galilean cities and even, the Talmudim claim (or rather fantasize), in the Roman imperial court. He or his son may have been the famous Jewish "ethnarch" referred to by Origen as behaving regally, to the point of executing criminals—though without imperial authorization. It was probably in this period, too, that the patriarchs began to claim Davidic ancestry. Cohen argues that around 200 rabbinic judicial activity broadened to include issues of interest outside rabbinic circles, like civil law and Sabbath observance. Apparently, rabbinic judicial prestige was growing again, perhaps in part because the rabbinic movement left its rural Galilean exile for the cities, mainly Sepphoris and Tiberias, but also Caesarea, Scythopolis-Beth Shean, and Lydda”.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996, 38-40

<sup>53</sup> From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple & Rabbinic Judaism, Lawrence H. Schiffman, KTAV:1991,174

<sup>54</sup> Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 bce to 640 ce. Seth Schwartz. Princeton:2001, 113

“The Galilee, the second major area of Jewish population at the time, remained virtually untouched by the devastation of the revolt and thus was able to assume a position of leadership as it absorbed refugees from the southern part of the country after the hostilities ended”.<sup>55</sup>

“The center of Jewish life moved from Judea to **towns and villages in Galilee that had survived the war unscathed**. ... With the emergence of Galilee as a major center of Jewish life, the rabbinic leaders also moved there. From places like Yavneh and Lydda in Judea, **they migrated north**. Indeed, the first rabbinic literary works were redacted (that is, compiled and edited) in Galilee, not Judea”.<sup>56</sup>

For our purposes, there are three implications of this:

1. Any of the leadership who had **encountered** Jesus and His followers **in Jerusalem or Judean** would **now be living ‘next door’ to those Galileans** who had a personal (or family, or community) remembrance of Jesus and His life.
2. Any **‘official’ interaction** between emerging Judaism and Jewish Christians in the area will originate among this Galilean group
3. To the extent this ‘new’ scholarly group develops an ‘official response’ to any remembrances of Jesus ‘on the ground’ or ‘in a text’, these responses will help identify the remembrances encountered (somewhat).

### **The data for continuity**

Here we are looking for indications of family stability, cultural continuity, and any social means for enforcing/supporting community/family longevity or identity. There are a couple of data points here:

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<sup>55</sup> Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development, Hershel Shanks (ed.), Biblical Archeology Society: 1992, 141f; Levine

<sup>56</sup> Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development, Hershel Shanks (ed.), Biblical Archeology Society: 1992, 196f, Cohen

“Nazareth lay beside Yafa or Yafia, a city that Josephus fortified in the first revolt against Rome and in which he lived (JW 2.20.6–573; Life 52–270). This village was known to be Jewish as late as the 4th century a.d”.<sup>57</sup>

“One priestly family by the name of Hapizez (or Hapis) settled in Nazareth (Mishmaroth 18). That Nazareth was the home of a priestly course is repeated in a fragment of a Byzantine period Hebrew inscription, a list of the priestly courses, found at Caesarea in 1962. In the 3d century, Nazareth still had a strong priestly character according to Midr. Qoh. 2.8”.<sup>58</sup>

“Fortunately we are in a position to fill out this picture of Sepphoris from rabbinic sources, both prior to and after 70 C.E. From these it is apparent that in the period before 70 C.E. Sepphoris was one of the few priestly towns in Galilee. The evidence of Rabbi Jose ben Halaphta who lived in Sepphoris in the second half of the second century C.E. is of particular significance, given his own genuine historical interest in the past of his people, and the fact that his father was head of the community in Sepphoris shortly after 70 C.E. Jose mentions that a priest from Sepphoris, Jose ben Illem took the place of the high priest on the day of atonement. We are able to date this event more precisely from Josephus, who tells that it was the place of his cousin Matthias who had rendered himself unclean the previous night. This occurred towards the end of the reign of Herod the Great (Ant 17:166), long after his purge of the Hasmonaean nobility. We are safe in assuming that this family at least survived both Herod's purges and the attack on the Galilean nobles who remained faithful to him (Ant 14:450) and that Sepphoris was their home, even though Matthias is described by Josephus as being from Jerusalem (Ant 17:78). We hear also of Arsela from Sepphoris, 'an Israelite' (i.e. a lay noble) who was given an active role in regard to the scapegoat rite on the day of atonement usually reserved for a priest (M. Yoma 6:3)...”<sup>59</sup>

“Galilee should probably not be lumped with Judea in discussions of the Roman disposition of the land following the reconquest. In either case, the territory was evidently not taken as imperial land after the revolt. Recent critical analysis suggests that only rebels' lands were confiscated. Early rabbinic literature indicates that Galilean households still farmed their own family inheritance, and were not largely tenants on imperial land. ...”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Anchor Bible Dictionary, David Noel Freedman (main ed.), DoubleDay:1992

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, Anchor

<sup>59</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 126-7

<sup>60</sup> Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee--the Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis, Richard A. Horsley, Trinity Press: 1996, 38-40

“In the second and third centuries the free population of Tiberias apparently consisted mostly, or almost entirely, of people who were in some sense Jewish. ... The rabbis unquestionably regarded Tiberias, along with Sepphoris and Lydda, as "Jewish," in contrast to the mainly pagan Scythopolis and Ptolemais. Probably in all these places there was a small Christian or Jewish-Christian presence, notwithstanding Epiphanius's claim (Panarion 30.11.9-10) that around 320 the cities and large villages of Galilee were entirely Jewish.”<sup>61</sup>

“Eventually all of Lower Galilee was divided between the territories of these two cities but Upper Galilee apparently continued as the separate district of Tetracomia. This is best explained by the strong persistence of Jewish village life in the area which had not been disturbed by the revolt”.<sup>62</sup>

Of special importance here is the existence (and use) of genealogical records—to prove family continuity. There are two data points (one Jewish, and one Jewish-Christian) to illustrate that these were still in use. (BTW, they are almost invariably ‘in use’ in any inheritance-based land-ownership society (!), so these cases are only the tip of the iceberg.)

“... and Rabbi Jose also informs us that old registers were kept in this city indicating who were Israelites of pure blood, equal to those whose ancestors were priests, levites, or members of the Sanhedrin (M. Kidd 4:5)”.<sup>63</sup>

“Apart from this, we also meet Jesus’ relatives as church leaders and travelling missionaries in some other scraps of information in Hegesippus and others. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 9:5 about the rights of a traveling apostle, rights that were used by “the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas”. Some 170–80 years later Julius Africanus said that Herod, being a non-Jew, had all Jewish family records burned so that no one should have an advantage on him, yet a few careful people had private records of their own, ... priding themselves on preserving the memory of their noble birth. Of such were the persons mentioned above, called *Desposyni* [Relatives of the Lord] from their connexion with the Saviour’s family. Coming from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Cochaba, they travelled over the rest of the land, explaining the aforesaid genealogy, as far as they could trace it, and from the Book of the Days [= Chronicles]. (Ecclesiastical History 1.1.14). ... Africanus’s concern in context is to explain the differences between the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke; this explains why he makes it sound as if the main contents of the preaching of the relatives of Jesus was their genealogy. The tradition on which he depends, however, could contain correct historical information: in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, his relatives emphasized his (and their) Davidic descent. That this was an important element in the earliest version of the Christian message is witnessed to by Paul in Romans 1:3–4, where he quotes an old Jewish-Christian kerygmatic formula ”.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 bce to 640 ce. Seth Schwartz. Princeton:2001,132

<sup>62</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980, 90-91

<sup>63</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980,126-127

<sup>64</sup> In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity. Oskar Skarsaune. IVP:2002,192

But you really didn't need written records (in an oral culture) to document family membership—the community around you simply 'remembered'. It was stable enough for generations and generations. A great example of this is the post-War/post-Revolt actions by Rome to make sure Davidic-based messianic fever did not arise again (after Bar Kochba). Three times they went into Galilee, queried people and records, and called the relatives of Jesus up on the carpet!

“Religious toleration went hand in hand with increased political vigilance in the decades after 70, and Rome took precautions which may have been excessive to guard against any resurgence of Jewish nationalism. Christian tradition tells of three occasions between 70 and the end of Trajan's reign on which members of the "family of David" were hunted down in Palestine. The first was "after the capture of Jerusalem", when Vespasian ordered a search to be made for all the members of the family of David, so that none of the "royal house" might be left in the province, and this led to a serious "persecution of the Jews". It is possible that "Vespasian" is an error and that the search was actually ordered by Titus before his return to Rome in 71. But be that as it may, the tradition is entirely credible and the purpose of the search clear: the messiah was expected from the house of David, messianic hopes had contributed to the outbreak of the revolt in 66, and Rome was anxious to forestall any recurrence of movements such as had disturbed the province periodically before it. It was a political precautionary measure, confused by Church historians with later Roman hostility towards the Church and magnified into a "persecution of the Jews" of which Jewish sources are completely ignorant. The menace, such as it was, was not regarded as entirely eliminated, for under Domitian members of the family were again rounded up. The story of this investigation, much fuller than the notice of the previous one and furnished with picturesque detail, cannot be taken literally, for in it members of the immediate family of Christ are haled before the emperor, personally present in Palestine (which Domitian never visited), who then terminates "the persecution of the Church" on discovering that they are poor working-class folk, not likely to constitute a political danger. But the significant point is that the men arrested are interrogated about "Christ and His kingdom." The enquiry thus had the same purpose as the earlier one, to nip potential messianic movements in the bud, and though only Christian Jews are named as its subjects, the third episode seems to involve non-Christian Jews also. Early in Trajan's reign the house of David was in trouble again, when Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, described as a cousin of Christ, was denounced by "certain heretics" to Atticus the legate of Judaea and executed; but his fate recoiled on the heads of his accusers, who were themselves arrested as members of the "royal family of the Jews", which was then being hunted down. This suggests that Simeon's enemies were members of his own family who had not adopted Christianity and were trying, unsuccessfully, to divert attention from themselves. If such Jews were in danger under Trajan, they will hardly have escaped under Domitian. The details of these stories, related from the Christian angle, matter little for the present study. Their overall significance for the history of the province after 70 is simply that for at least thirty years the Romans were on the alert to guard against incipient messianic movements and to pounce on anyone who looked like a potential trouble-maker. And lack of evidence does not mean that their vigilance was relaxed after the beginning of the second century. But the operations can more accurately be described as police measures than as "persecutions".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Jews under Roman Rule, From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations. E. Mary Smallwood. Brill:2001, 351f

In other words, the family blood ties were public enough that Rome could carry out these actions. This argues, though, that we can also use the family of Jesus as a data point on continuity. They are said to be based out of two cities during this entire time—one of which was Nazareth (where a priestly station also existed—as noted above).

“These wandering missionaries of our Lord’s family are said to have preached in the land of Israel and lived in the villages of Nazareth and Cochaba. The latter is very likely modern Kaukab, sixteen kilometers north of Nazareth”.<sup>66</sup>

“In the 3d century the Christian martyr Conon from Nazareth of the family of Jesus was killed in Asia Minor (Bagatti 1969: 16).”<sup>67</sup>

“More promising is the evidence of Julius Africanus (c. 170 C.E.) in his letter to Aristides, namely that the *desposynoi*, that is the cousins of the Lord 'from the Jewish villages of Nazara and Cochaba traversed the rest of the land expounding their genealogy from the book of Chronicles as far as they went' (Eccles. Hist. 1,7.15). The context is a discussion of the differing genealogies of Mt and Lk and it is possible that in the second century different people laid claim to being cousins of the Lord within the Jewish Christian community, relying on the differing genealogies”.<sup>68</sup>

What this means is that we have a concrete example from history of a family which spanned the two events and lived in the same town all that time: Jesus’ family, at least down to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. And the priestly families in Sepphoris, and probably the Tiberian house-manager servants did too—at a minimum. We have one more stake in the ground to place: that there was probably a Jewish-Christian witness (in addition to the family of Jesus) within the area of Galilee during our period. We have already seen that, -

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<sup>66</sup> In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity. Oskar Skarsaune. IVP:2002,192

<sup>67</sup> Anchor Bible Dictionary, David Noel Freedman (main ed.), DoubleDay:1992

<sup>68</sup> Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism, Sean Freyne, T&T Clark:1980,352

“The rabbis unquestionably regarded Tiberias, along with Sepphoris and Lydda, as "Jewish," in contrast to the mainly pagan Scythopolis and Ptolemais. Probably in all these places there was a small Christian or Jewish-Christian presence, notwithstanding Epiphanius's claim (Panarion 30.11.9-10) that around 320 the cities and large villages of Galilee were entirely Jewish”.<sup>69</sup>

And the non-heretical nature of the Nazarenes – who were very probably in Transjordan, and possibly operating in Galilee too—was a Jewish-Christian presence:

“The Nazarenes. Despite the considerable symbolic significance of the event just mentioned, it should not mislead us to think that Jewish Christianity completely disappeared. In the middle of the second century, some twenty-five years after the Bar Kokhba revolt, Justin knew of Jewish believers who had two characteristics: (1) They believed in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and (2) they continued to observe the law of Moses without requiring that their Gentile brethren do the same. ... In the third and fourth centuries there is still solid evidence for the existence of such Jewish believers. In the fourth century they are called “the Nazarenes”, and from Jerome and Epiphanius we get the following information: they are few, mainly to be found in the region of Israel and Syria. They recognize Jesus as the Son of God, they accept the virgin birth, they recognize the apostleship of Paul and the Gentile mission, and they have a gospel in Hebrew. These two church fathers—who were zealous hunters of all heresies—found nothing wrong with the doctrines of the Nazarenes. But they took offense at another aspect of this Jewish Christian group: they continued to keep the law, that is, circumcision and the Sabbath. By this time there was no longer any willingness in the Gentile church to accept such Christians; the spirit of brotherly recognition, as seen in Justin, was gone”.<sup>70</sup>

So, the players are on stage: we have the ‘embedded’ Galilean witnesses (friendly and maybe hostile) and memory-carriers of Jesus, we have new possible ‘Jerusalem witnesses’ who observed Jesus decades before, we have some level of Jewish-Christian witness, and we have a new, “fiercely re-configuring” Judaism leadership. Let’s see what their interactions tell us about our question of ‘nobody there to refute a gospel?’

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<sup>69</sup> Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 bce to 640 ce. Seth Schwartz. Princeton:2001,132

<sup>70</sup> In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity. Oskar Skarsaune. IVP:2001

## Evidences of Jewish/Christian interaction during this period (in the Land)

What we are looking for here is the (post-biblical) Jewish response to Jewish-Christian proclamation in our area/period. As Judaism-without-a-Temple gets to work trying to reinvent itself, national identity becomes 'at risk'. The fierce boundary setting requirement of this period ("this is a Jew—and that is not") is standard for threatened organizations (Christianity went through it early and over and over and over again...). A practical starting point for delineating what you are is to first *list all the things you are not*. And Galilean Judaism defines that during our period and in interaction with Jewish-Christian literature. Consider this simple summary of Jewish response:

“As we glance back over this chapter, a number of things come to light. There is evidence that Jews persecuted and harassed Christians intermittently in a number of locations. This could take the form of synagogue discipline or of persuading Gentile authorities to act on their behalf. Christians nevertheless had a tendency to exaggerate the intensity and extent of Jewish hostility, and this has unduly influenced certain strains of scholarly analysis since. Christians were included among those targeted by the Jewish authorities at Yavneh. The banning of books, occasional expulsion, and liturgical malediction all appeared in new or revised form during the Yavnean period, and their implementation throughout world Jewry was probably encouraged by roving envoys. From the rabbinic viewpoint, Christians were one of several troublesome groups of nonconformists, but Christians increasingly saw themselves as singled out for rabbinic antipathy. The Bar Cochba uprising may have been an important turning point, precipitating the expansion of the synagogue malediction to include Gentile Christians too. And, as an element of liturgical routine, the more this malediction focused on Christians the greater its influence would have been on popular Jewish attitudes.

Traditions about Jesus as a miracle worker and teacher are prominent in Jewish sources. Josephus, noncommittally, describes him in just these terms, but the rabbis preserve the negative version of the same two traits: that Jesus was a magician and deceiver of the people. The rabbinic view is ascribed more generally to Jews by Justin and Origen. In the stories about Eliezer ben Dama and R. Eliezer there is a hint that some rabbis consorted with Christians until they were challenged by stricter colleagues or came under suspicion by political authorities. .. Christology was one of the main obstacles to Jewish-Christian rapprochement. There is nothing surprising about this, nor about the two foci of disagreement that appear in many different sources: messianism and monotheism. The issue of messiahship does not arise explicitly in the rabbinic sources, though the polemical reading of Jesus' role as miracle worker and teacher effectively denies to him activities that some sources expected of the messiah. The assertion of Jesus' divinity met with several objections. One centered around his arrival in the world, about which the rabbis transmitted a polemical (perhaps, unknown to them, historical) line: that Jesus was a bastard and his mother an adulteress. If the idea of God's becoming human was absurd, the idea of a second god was for many Jews blasphemous. To the rabbis, Christians were part of a wider heretical tendency in which the existence of "two powers" in heaven was espoused. This may have made the Christians more difficult to combat, since other Jews were promoting speculations along the same lines. ...



Overall, Jewish reaction to Christians took many forms: political action, communal discipline, liturgical innovation, exegetical reasoning, and polemical subversion. Variety of action, however, is not matched in the sources by much variety of mood. Most of the evidence we have considered in this chapter suggests that resistance and opposition were the instinctive modes of Jewish response. But even if this reflects the preponderant reality, it is still misleading. Recalling Josephus's statement, and the possible rabbinic references to amicable contact between Jews and Jewish Christians, might seem to be clutching at straws, and it does not do much to balance the account. However, the actions and attitude of Trypho, as well as the encouragement that some Christian Judaizers were presumably given from the Jewish side, are only two other factors that need to be considered for a fully rounded picture. [RS:193f <sup>71</sup>; note R. Eleazar b. Dama died 'sometime in the first third of the second century' <sup>72</sup>), and R. Eliezer around 90 AD.]

.....and.....

“Jewish Polemic and Rejection of Christianity. Jewish polemic directed against Christianity could be just as harsh and ugly as was Christian polemic, though with the ascendancy of Christianity, Jewish polemic came to be muted and sometimes was even edited out of texts. Some of the Jewish polemic is preserved in “dialogues” composed by Christians. The best known is Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Although these dialogues are artificial and routinely portray the Christian apologists as refuting, even silencing, their Jewish opponents, the nature of the objections raised by the Jews in all probability accurately reflects the arguments and polemic that Jews directed against Christians.

Justin’s Trypho found it difficult to accept that Jesus could really have been the fulfilment of the Jewish Scriptures. How could Jesus have been the Messiah, since he had been defeated and put to death by the Romans in such a shameful manner? Trypho declares: “Be assured that all our nation awaits the Messiah; and we admit that all the Scriptures which you have quoted refer to him. . . . But we are in doubt about whether the Messiah should be so shamefully crucified. For whoever is crucified is said in the Law to be accursed, so that I am very skeptical on this point. It is quite clear, to be sure, the Scriptures announce that the Messiah had to suffer; but we wish to learn if you can prove it to us whether by suffering he was cursed . . . Prove to us whether he must also be crucified and die such a disgraceful and dishonourable death, cursed by the Law. For we cannot bring ourselves even to consider this” (Dial. Tryph. 89–90).

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<sup>71</sup> Roman Satire. Michael Coffey. BristolClassicalPress:1989,193f

<sup>72</sup> Jesus in the Talmud. Peter Schafer. PrincetonUP:2007, 54

With the passage of time the polemic became much sharper, even hateful. Civil arguments, such as we find in Justin's Dialogue, gave way to vituperation and slurs. The polemic found in the Talmud and Midrashim document some of this nastier polemic. In reference to Jesus' birth we find: "She who was the descendant of princes and governors [= Mary] played the harlot with carpenters [= Joseph]" (*b. Sanh.* 106a). ... In various places Jesus is accused of having practiced magic and having led Israel astray (*b. Sanh.* 43a; *t. Šab.* 11.15; *b. Šab.* 104b). Indeed, Jesus can be raised through incantation (*b. Git.* 57a, MS M).

As early as the end of the first century the liturgy of the synagogue was modified to discourage Christian Jews. It was apparently at this time that the twelfth benediction of the ancient Jewish prayer, called the Amidah (or Shemoneh Esreh), was expanded: "Can anyone among you frame a benediction relating to the heretics? Samuel the Lesser arose and composed it" (*b. Ber.* 28b). Samuel the Lesser's composition may have something to do with the revision of the twelfth benediction: "For apostates let there be no hope, and the kingdom of arrogance quickly uproot. [In a moment let the Nazarenes and the heretics be destroyed; let them be blotted from the Book of Life, and with the righteous not be inscribed.] Blessed are you, O Lord, who loves judgment!" (Amidah §12). The bracketed words are thought to be the later inserted material. It was probably to this malediction (often referred as the *Birkat ha-Minim*, lit. "blessing of the heretics") that Justin alluded when he told Trypho, "You curse in your synagogues all those who are called from him Christians" (Justin Dial. Tryph. 96).<sup>73</sup>

We don't have room here to unpack these, but if you look over the responses, you can see that they match up pretty well with what a Jewish-Christian might define as his or her belief at the (pre-Church Councils) time. There are no 'straw men' in there: they would be addressing items that they could hear from Galileans in Nazareth or Greeks in Antioch. But some are closer-to-home, around Nazareth. The issues of Mary's infidelity, Jesus' sorcery [i.e., His mostly-Galilean and probably-remembered miracles!], and His messianic deception are all found (or at least hinted at) in the Gospel of John. But this is an exercise in literary 'reverse engineering'—figuring out what the audience 'said first' in a piece of literature or tradition. And in this case, the response suggests that much of the core proclamation of the Gospels was circulating in Galilee during the 70-135-200 'reinvention period'. [Note: this 'reverse engineering' methodology is generally very risky, as can be noted by those who study the Heresiologists. We cannot be sure the Heresiologist is representing their opponent fairly/accurately—since we do not have any of the alleged heretic's actual writing. But in our case, we do have the 'heretic writing'—in our NT documents.]

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<sup>73</sup> Martin, R. P., & Davids, P. H. (2000, c1997). Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**Summary:** Our first three points argued that there were **plenty** of people who lived through the war, that their ability to articulate objections (e.g. the polemical responses to Christians) was always there and increasing in sophistication, and that the Christian witness (of at least, the very flesh-and-blood family of Jesus in Nazareth) was available for them to ‘shoot’ at. And they shot at it—at various times and in various ways—but this confirms that their intellectual world confronted the traditions of the historical Jesus (e.g. birth, parentage, Galilean ministry) and confronted the theological explanations of the Jewish-Christian church of the time (e.g. Jesus as Messiah and as Son of God).