

**@CN = Chapter 6**

**@CT = Jewish Followers of Jesus and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: Reexamining the Christian Sources**

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This chapter explores the relationship of “Jewish followers of Jesus” to Bar Kokhba and the Second Jewish Revolt by examining several ancient Christian sources on this topic.<sup>1</sup> By employing the phrase “Jewish followers of Jesus,” I am following the lead of Boyarin (2009), who urges abandoning the use of the problematic term “Jewish Christians.” With this rather pedantic nomenclature I am referring primarily to individuals of ancestral Jewish heritage (the ethnic criterion), still residing in Palestine, who observe the Torah in its so-called ritual dimension (the criterion of praxis), like many of their contemporary Jewish compatriots. In this chapter I am more interested in addressing the issue of Jewish (rather than Gentile) followers of Jesus and their responses to the Bar Kokhba Revolt, because the patristic sources (assessed below) assume the existence of an ethnically Jewish and Torah observant *ekklesia* (church) established in Palestine up until the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Evidence for the presence of Jewish followers of Jesus in Galilee also appears in the rabbinic sources (e.g., *t. Hull.* 2:24). I prefer using the term “follower” rather than “believer.” Skarsaune (2007a, 3–21) currently employs the latter label, but its use risks overlooking other important factors for assessing the Jewish identity of followers of Jesus, particularly the significance of Torah observance.

According to many scholars, there was and only could have been one reaction on the part of the Jewish disciples of Jesus to the Bar Kokhba Revolt: to withdraw and not support such an endeavor at all. Jewish followers of Jesus, in conspicuous contradiction to many of their Jewish compatriots in Palestine, could respond to this political affair only negatively, because of a messianic dilemma they faced: they already had their messiah, Jesus, and could not dishonor that allegiance by submitting to another messianic claimant, Bar Kokhba (Dunn 2006, 317–18). Upon this stream of thought flows a wider metanarrative, substantially critiqued in recent times, which posits that the Second Jewish Revolt marked the immediate end of any real Jewish–Christian engagement, sealing the so-called “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity. Dunn’s words on this issue are well known by now among scholars of early Christianity and Judaism:

@Ext = *The period between the two Jewish revolts (66–70 and 132–135) was decisive for the parting of the ways.* After the first revolt it could be said that all was still to play for. But after the second revolt the separation of the main bodies of Christianity and Judaism was clear-cut and final, whatever interaction there continued to be at the margins. (2006, 312)

It is becoming clearer, however, that we should not exaggerate the immediate import and impact of the two Jewish revolts as watershed moments for all Jews and Christians from this period (Schwartz and Weiss 2012). Even Dunn subsequently recognized the complexity of this matter, in the preface to the second edition of his book (2006, xxii–xxiv). The question of the “parting of the ways” has often been analyzed with a disproportionate attention given to doctrinal disputes, to the detriment of appreciating social, political, and economic factors (Tomson 2003, 5). It comes as no surprise, then, that many scholars still make sweeping statements about the parting of the ways, positing an early date for a definitive and final separation between Judaism and Christianity by the first century. Thus, one prominent New Testament scholar roundly states in a commentary on the Book of Acts: “Judaism and Christianity began to emerge as clearly distinct entities c. 90 CE. A generation later, Luke was engaged in retrojecting this separation to the ‘primitive’ period” (Pervo 2009, 685). Quite tellingly, Mor, in his analysis of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, presupposes that the “Jewish Christians” formed part of the non-Jewish population during the revolt (1991, 187–90; 2002, 108).

But social factors and political events from those times as well as human experience teach us that the reality on the ground must have been far more complicated during and immediately after the revolt. Undoubtedly the two Jewish revolts marked and even destroyed the lives of thousands of Jews and many followers of Jesus living in Palestine. Nevertheless, Jewish memory could always recall the previous destruction of the First Temple and its successful reconstruction in order to cope with such trauma. Moreover, it would not have been entirely clear in the immediate aftermath of such wars in which direction events would turn, enabling some Jews to hope for eschatological liberation or at least to envision a pragmatic reconciliation with Rome that would allow for a return to a former state of events. Only with the passing of time, as it became increasingly clear that the Temple would not be restored in the immediate future and that

the Judeans, prohibited from entering Jerusalem, would not gain independence from Rome, did Christian authors especially use the Bar Kokhba event as a means for polemically theologizing Jewish history and constructing Christian identity vis-à-vis a reified Judaism, contributing in this way to the general impression ever since that the Second Revolt represented a watershed moment and a final turning point in Jewish–Christian relations.

Unfortunately, given the state and provenance of the evidence available thus far, we are often forced to speculate on certain matters, especially the role, if any, that Jewish followers may have played during such turmoil. Nonetheless, I strive to point to social, political, and military considerations that have been neglected in many inquiries on this topic, to provide better avenues for examining the extant literary sources. Because the relevant material stems predominantly from patristic sources composed a couple of centuries or more after the reported events (save for Justin Martyr), it is important to highlight the patristic musings about the Bar Kokhba Revolt, how this event was refurbished by the church fathers in their attempt to shape the form of Jewish–Christian engagement in their own day and milieu. In other words, while seeking precious historical kernels that may shed light on the events of circa 132–135 CE, I have become especially aware of the ideological motives of various church fathers in rewriting the Bar Kokhba event. This phenomenon can in turn inform us about the ongoing process of separation between Judaism and Christianity throughout Late antiquity.

### **@H1 = Bar Kokhba’s Messianic Status**

In one of his numerous publications, Oppenheimer (1984) ponders whether Bar Kokhba was viewed as a messianic deliverer in a divine or supernatural sense, or his messianic status was understood in a more realistic manner, in other words, in a national, political, and military sense. The key rabbinic text, explicitly identifying Bar Kokhba as a messianic figure, appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (*y. Ta’an. 4:6 68d*):

@Ext = R. Shimon bar Yohai taught: “Akiva, my teacher, expounded [the verse from Num. 24:7] ‘a star [*Kokhav*] shall come forth from Jacob’ [to mean] ‘Kozeva [meaning, “falsehood”] shall come forth.” When R. Akiva saw Bar Kozeva he said: “This one is the king messiah.” R. Yohanan ben Torta said to him: “Akiva, grass shall grow on your cheeks and still the son of David shall not

come!” (author’s translation)

According to this passage, R. Akiva, citing Num. 24:7, a biblical verse with messianic overtones for many ancient Jews, allegedly proclaimed Bar Kokhba “king messiah.” R. Yohanan ben Torta reportedly rebuked R. Akiva for holding such views. Both rabbinic figures were contemporaries of Bar Kokhba. A rabbinic play on names occurs here between the word “star,” which appears in Num. 24:7 and from which Bar Kokhba derives his messianized name, and “Kozeva,” meaning falsehood. This pun conceals the largely negative portrait ascribed by later rabbinic sages to the figure of Bar Kokhba. Nevertheless, the Jerusalem Talmud portrays a central rabbinic figure, R. Akiva, as sympathetic to the Jewish leader.

Oppenheimer, like many other scholars, assumes that the historical R. Akiva actually supported Bar Kokhba. Peter Schäfer (2002) questions this assumption. Settling this matter is not essential for this inquiry. More significant is Oppenheimer’s argument about the rabbinic perception in this passage of Bar Kokhba’s messianic character and function. He maintains that we should put special stress on the word “king,” rather than “messiah,” which would emphasize the political and worldly expectations R. Akiva allegedly had of Bar Kokhba (1984, 154). In other words, Bar Kokhba should be viewed as a leader embodying earthly, military functions, much like the biblical figure David. Remarkably, the Bar Kokhba letters do not provide any evidence that Shimon ben Kosiva viewed himself as a superhuman or heavenly messiah, the savior of the end of days, one who would raise the dead or perform other similar fantastic miracles. Shimon ben Kosiva’s administration of the revolt, as presented in his own letters, reflects pragmatic concerns and is devoid of mystical elements (Oppenheimer 1984, 161; Mildenberg 1984, 76; Jaffé 2006).

It also seems that extensive preparation and organization for the revolt were set in motion before confrontations erupted, with the banner of war being sagaciously raised only after Hadrian had left Palestine. Such indicators do not fit well with an eschatological messianic revolt, which by its very nature is characterized by spontaneous eruption (Oppenheimer 1984, 162).

Oppenheimer finds it more useful to compare Shimon ben Kosiva with Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, as both characters bore the same title, “Nasi,” sometimes translated

as “prince” or “patriarch” (see Goodblatt 1984). In his own letters and on coins from the period, Bar Kokhba is referred to as “Nasi,” not “messiah.” The essential difference between the two, however, according to Oppenheimer, lies in their divergent strategies in bringing redemption to the people of Israel. One employed military means, seeking to deliver a swift blow to the Roman Empire; the other used diplomacy and gradually restored some of Israel’s former glory. But in the end, both sought to bring restoration to Israel through realistic and earthly means.

We have briefly rehearsed some of Oppenheimer’s findings to emphasize how the Jewish perception of Bar Kokhba’s messiahship during the revolt would not have necessarily complied with the polemically charged portrait we are about to discover in the patristic sources that portray him as an anti-Christ, the false counterpart of Jesus. As Bourgel notes: “It seems to us very unlikely that Bar-Kokhba was seen as a supernatural being by his contemporaries. Undoubtedly, at some points in the war, he was recognized as a messianic deliverer but it would be misleading to consider that his supposed messianism derived from a reflection on his very nature in the manner of Jesus-Christ” (2009, 270).

This suggests that the Jewish populace, including possibly even some Jewish followers of Jesus, could have viewed Bar Kokhba’s messianic role in various ways and interpreted his movement in a manner that complied with their own ideology and expectations. Those positing a messianic dilemma allegedly confronting the Jewish followers of Jesus of that time should at least consider Oppenheimer’s thesis. Though impossible to prove, it could be that *some* Jewish followers of Jesus did not view the roles and ideologies associated with the figures of Jesus and Bar Kokhba as mutually exclusive and irreconcilable.

#### **@H1 = Jewish Followers of Jesus and Bar Kokhba in the Christian Sources**

Two works written in modern Hebrew are beneficial for assessing the question of the Christian descriptions of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Yeivin’s dated work (1957) is useful because it contains a large sampling of passages from Christian sources, but it only provides some preliminary comments on each passage. Duker-Fishman brings the majority of the texts into the conversation and concludes that generally the patristic authors blame the Jews for instigating the revolt, claim that the construction of Aelia

Capitolina came only in response to the uprising of the Jews, and view the defeat and the ensuing sanctions against the Jews as proof of God's punishment (1984). Although Duker-Fishman does not deal with the issue of Jewish followers of Jesus proper, nor fully appreciate how her findings could address the question of Jewish-Christian *Auseinandersetzung*, her discussion of some of the ideological features in the Christian sources is worthwhile to consider as we take a closer look at some of the statements made by Justin Martyr, Eusebius, and other Christian writers.

### **@H2 = Justin Martyr**

Justin Martyr remains one of our most important literary sources on the Jewish revolt, because his writings are the nearest in time to the events and he explicitly refers to the revolt. Justin Martyr was also originally from Neapolis, Samaria, a region within the geographical scope of the revolt, although he was not present in the area at that time (see Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 1; *Dialogue with Trypho* 28.2). Unfortunately, he provides us with virtually no information about the political and social causes for the revolt. His interest in Bar Kokhba lay more within the theological sphere.

In his *First Apology*, Justin Martyr asserts that Bar Kokhba commanded that *only* Christians should suffer persecution unless they would deny Jesus Christ and utter blasphemy (*1 Apol.* 31.6): “For in the Jewish war which now occurred, Bar Kokhba, the leader of the revolt of the Jews, ordered that Christians alone should be led to terrible punishments unless they would deny Jesus, the Christ, and blaspheme.”

In this passage Justin Martyr describes the Bar Kokhba Revolt as an event that occurred recently in his own day. The fact that he already refers to Shimon ben Kosiba by his “nickname,” Bar Kokhba, is indicative of how rapidly the image of the Jewish warrior became wrapped in a messianic aura. This observation does not go against the argument presented in the previous section, because I do not deny that Bar Kokhba was perceived as a messianic leader, though certainly not in the super-divine sense Christians view(ed) their own Christ. Mildenberg states:

@Ext = Even though this messianic pun may have been current during the war, the Jewish fighters and partisans should not be pictured as having actually believed that Shim'on ben Kosiba was the Messiah; the Judaeen Desert documents make clear that the Jews knew their leader was a man like themselves.

The creative pun on the leader's name in Aramaic would simply have given the Jews a popular rallying cry for their cause. (1984, 76)

Justin's declaration that Christians *alone* were persecuted by Bar Kokhba should lead us to question the authenticity of such a statement as well as the ideological motivations that may be lurking behind it. It is impossible to believe that Jewish followers of Jesus living in Palestine would have been the *only* group singled out by Bar Kokhba for persecution, because of clear evidence indicating otherwise. For example, the Bar Kokhba letters reveal that strong measures were applied against people who refused to participate in the war. Thus, in one interesting letter, Bar Kokhba threatens to put a certain Yeshua ben Galgoula in fetters for refusing to follow orders. The letter reads: "From Shimeon ben Kosiba [Bar Kochba] to Yeshua ben Galgoula and to the men of the fort, peace. I take heaven to witness against me that unless you mobilise [destroy?] the Galileans who are with you every man I will put in fetters on your feet as I did to ben Aphlul" (trans. from Yadin 1971, 137–38).

Yadin rightly rejects the suggestion that the reference to the Galileans alludes to Christians, since there is no further qualification of the term, which in any case could refer to a variety of people living in Galilee. Other attestations about Shimon ben Kosiva's attempts to punish those who did not support his revolt or follow his instructions could be easily multiplied (see Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux 1961; Yadin 2002). Quite significantly, we never come across the messianic criterion as the reason for meting out punishment against nonconformers and nonparticipants. Some Jewish disciples of Jesus, therefore, may have experienced persecution along with *other* non-Christian groups who refused to support the uprising, but the focus by Justin on an exclusive persecution against Christians cannot be trusted.

We should also pay careful attention to the wider literary context in which Justin Martyr's passage appears. In the thirty-first chapter of his *First Apology*, Justin also affirms that the Jews are Christians' foes and enemies, killing and punishing Christians *whenever* they have the power (*1 Apol.* 31.5). To bolster his theological claims about the supposed Jewish propensity toward persecuting Christians, he immediately describes briefly the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Later in his *First Apology* (47.1-6), he even interprets the defeat of the Jews and their subsequent ban from Jerusalem as fulfillment of scripture.

Citing Isaiah 64:10-12, 1:7 as well as Jeremiah 27:3, Justin asserts that it was God's will that Judea should be laid waste and that Jews should be prohibited from entering Jerusalem—a decree he claims was enforced up to his own day, some twenty-five years or so after the war (see Skarsaune 1987, 160–62, 288–95).

The reason for their expulsion, according to Justin, is their alleged slaying of the “Just One” and persecution of his followers (cf. *I Apol.* 48.4; *Dial.* 16.4; 108:2; 133; 136). This polemical portrayal would fit perfectly with Justin's wider program of “formal” appeal to the Roman emperors and officials to recognize the legitimacy of Christianity. Let us not forget that Justin's *Apology* is nominally addressed to none other than the emperor Antoninus, his son Caesar Verissimus (i.e., Marcus Aurelius), Lucius Verus (also Caesar, an adopted son of Hadrian), and the Roman Senate (*I Apol.* 1.1).

In harmony with his opening address, Justin seeks to demonstrate that Christians are not enemies of the state (e.g., *I Apol.* chs. 11 and 12), but respect its official and recognized authorities (e.g., *I Apol.* 17). Justin contrasts this Christian attitude toward the Roman Empire with the rebellious behavior of the Jews toward Romans and Christians alike (similarly, Bourgel 2009, 245–46; Flusser 1988, 636–37).

Justin's other work, *The Dialogue with Trypho*, was written in the shadow of the Second Revolt (Skarsaune 2007b, 384). Indirect references and allusions to the revolt appear in the background several times throughout this work. Thus, already at the beginning of the *Dialogue*, Justin presents Trypho as “a Hebrew of the circumcision” who had recently escaped from the war and found refuge in Greece (*Dial.* 1.3). This passage suggests that refugees from the war had left Judea and managed to find a safe haven elsewhere around the Mediterranean basin. Justin may have gathered some information about the revolt from such people. Obviously this does not mean that he transmitted what he had learned without theological bias and interest. Justin integrates the Bar Kokhba event into his wider ideological scheme, in which he seeks to highlight Christian abstinence from this anti-Roman affair and to announce the supposed eclipse of Judaism. Thus he transforms the traditional, positive symbolism ascribed by Jews to physical circumcision of the flesh into a sign that separated the Jews from all nations and Christians, so that the former might be singled out to incur their current suffering, that is, their banishment under the decree of Hadrian from going up to Jerusalem (*Dial.* 16.2).



Later in the *Dialogue* Justin draws again from the motif of circumcision in conjunction with the decrees issued against the Jews, reiterating that circumcision was given to the Jews as a distinguishing sign so that they alone could now suffer what they justly deserve. Because of their defeat, the Jews can no longer lay hands on Christians as they supposedly had in the past (92.2).

Of course Jews were not the only people who practiced circumcision in antiquity, although “for Greek and Latin writers the Jews were the circumcised *par excellence*” (Stern 1984, 1:444). But Justin is hardly interested in reporting accurate facts about history and ethnic practices. Just as he presents the Christians as the only victims persecuted by Bar Kokhba, so he also singles out Jewish circumcision as a sign of divine punishment.

In hindsight, of course, few would wish to be associated with a failed campaign, and it is understandable that some would seek ways to distance themselves from such events in the aftermath of failure. Thus, in a late rabbinic text from the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Sanh.* 93b), Bar Kokhba appears before the rabbinic sages and claims to be the messiah, but the rabbis actually find him to be an imposter and have him killed! Obviously there is no authentic historical recollection regarding Bar Kokhba in this anecdote. Instead, as the Babylonian rabbis looked back at Bar Kokhba, who from their angle was a false messiah and leader of a failed and misguided revolt, they wrestled with the issue of how one of their greatest rabbinic sages (R. Akiva) had offered his support for this “messianic pretender.” As a result, the Babylonian sages polished their heritage by claiming that their rabbinic predecessors actually killed Bar Kokhba, thereby putting an end to a revolt they felt uneasy being associated with (Oppenheimer 1984, 156–57).

All of the aforementioned passages from the *Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho* illustrate how Justin theologically interpreted and appropriated the Bar Kokhba event. While Ben Kosiva may indeed have persecuted Christians, he may have been indifferent about whether they wanted to continue believing in their messiah, provided they showed support for the war. As a pragmatic military leader, it would have been in his interest to recruit as many volunteers as possible for the war, and this could have led him to overlook some of the theological differences, magnified by Justin, in order to unite his front against the incoming Roman enemies. Dio Cassius (*Roman History*, 59.12–14)

claims that even non-Jews participated in the war. This claim may be confirmed in part by some of the material data, such as papyrus Yadin 51 (Mor 1991, 182–87). If this was the case, then participation in the revolt did not require recognizing Bar Kokhba as the messiah, making the complete withdrawal of followers of Jesus even more conspicuous.

Nevertheless, the evidence from Justin Martyr, despite the theological issues highlighted above, suggests that some Jewish followers of Jesus could not negotiate and embrace a simultaneous allegiance to their Christ, Jesus, and the political messianism ascribed to Bar Kokhba and his movement. Bauckham (1998, 228) rightly claims that “it is unlikely that Justin should have cited this single instance of Jewish persecution of Christians unless he knew it to be true” (similarly Wilson 1995, 6). For whatever theological and social-political reasons, some Jewish followers of Jesus refused to participate in the revolt, and Bar Kokhba sought to punish them, as he did other non-Christian Jews, not necessarily because such people did not recognize his messiahship, which he apparently never openly confessed, but simply because they did not actively support and participate in his campaign against Rome.

#### **@H2 = Eusebius**

As we turn to Eusebius, much of the preliminary comments applied to Justin’s works seems equally appropriate to those penned by the church historian from Caesarea, whose apologetics lie on the same trajectory as his predecessor. Accordingly, Eusebius draws directly from Justin, repeating verbatim the latter’s assertion that Bar Kokhba exclusively persecuted the Christians if they refused to blaspheme their Christ (*Hist. eccl.* 4.8). Moreover, for Eusebius, Bar Kokhba was nothing more than “a man inclined to murder and robbery,” who built on the reputation of his name to mislead others into thinking that he was “like a starlight descended from heaven” who could perform wonders for the benefit of those suffering from misfortunes (*Hist. eccl.* 4.8). This tendency to highlight the false messianic credentials of Bar Kokhba continued to develop in the patristic tradition. Jerome, for example, portrays Bar Kokhba as a deceiving character, claiming that the “famed Bar Chocabas, the instigator of the Jewish uprising, kept fanning a lighted blade of straw in his mouth with puffs of breath so as to give the impression that he was spewing out flames” (*The Apology against the Books of Rufinus* 3.31, in Hritzu 1965).

On the other hand, Eusebius records an alternative tradition that merely states: “Cochebas, duke of the Jewish sect, killed the Christians with all kinds of persecutions, [when] they refused to help him against the Roman troops” (Latin version of Eusebius’s *Chronicle* in Yadin 1971, 258). As Bourgel notes, the incentive for the persecution in the latter passage differs from the former: no mention is made of religious beliefs. Eusebius may have drawn here from a tradition he knew or had access to in Palestine. The reliability of this tradition seems stronger than Justin Martyr’s idealized persecution, because it is not as apologetic and conforms to the military agenda advocated by Bar Kokhba (2009, 247–49). On the other hand, we must note that Eusebius’s explicit claim that Christians were persecuted for their refusal to fight against the *Romans* signals more strongly than his predecessor, Justin Martyr did, Christian fidelity to the Roman Empire in an age when Rome was officially undergoing a process of Christianization. Thus, Eusebius portrays the Jews, as embodied by their notorious leader Bar Kokhba, as bitter enemies of the Roman state, persecuting the Christians who remain unwilling to fight against Rome.

Like his predecessor Justin Martyr, Eusebius interprets the defeat of the Jews as fulfillment of divine prophecy. In his work *Theophania*, Eusebius comments extensively on the prophecies ascribed to Jesus in the canonical gospels regarding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. After asserting the fulfillment of Jesus’s prophecies on the destruction of the Temple during the First Jewish Revolt, Eusebius provides a new twist to the “prediction” appearing in the gospel of Luke that “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24), interpreting it in light of the Second Jewish Revolt:

@Ext = He says after this, that the city [Jerusalem] shall be inhabited, not by the Jews, but by the Gentiles, when speaking thus, “*And Jerusalem shall be trampled on by the Gentiles.*” It was known therefore to Him, that it should be inhabited by the Gentiles. . . . And, how these things have been fulfilled, many words are not wanted (to shew); because, we can easily see with our own eyes, how the Jews are dispersed into all nations; and, how the inhabitants of that which was formerly Jerusalem—but is now named Aelia by Aelius Hadrian—are foreigners, and the descendants of another race. (in Lee 1843)

Eusebius applies a new reading to Luke’s phrase, “Jerusalem will be trampled on

by the Gentiles,” never foreseen by the author of the third gospel. Whereas Luke could bemoan the fact that Gentiles would *trample* upon the city of Jerusalem and its Temple, Eusebius transforms this lamentation to state that divine will intended for non-Jews to *inhabit* the city. This understanding of prophecy complies with Eusebius’s abrupt claim of an immediate reconfiguration of the Jewish *ekklesia* of Jerusalem, which existed until the Bar Kokhba Revolt. In his *Historia ecclesiastica* (4.5–6), Eusebius relates that until the Second Revolt all bishops in Jerusalem were of Hebrew descent:

@Ext = This much from things written have I ascertained, that until the siege of the Jews, during the time of Hadrian, there were in number fifteen successions of bishops, whom they say were all by origin Hebrews, and purely received the knowledge of Christ, with the result that they were also in fact deemed worthy of the service of bishops among those able to judge such matters. For at that time the whole church was composed by them of Hebrew believers, from the time of the apostles up until the siege they endured at that time, during which the Jews, having rebelled again against the Romans, were conquered after not a few battles (*Hist. eccl.* 4.5.2). (author’s translation)

For Eusebius, the Hebrew “church” of the circumcision existed in Jerusalem from the time of the apostles all the way to the Second Revolt. He emphasizes that this “dynasty” of Hebrew “bishops” ceased at that time and then enumerates the names of fifteen Hebrew bishops from James, the brother of Jesus, to Judas, the fifteenth and last bishop. Regardless of the question of the historical authenticity of this list (see Irshai 1993, 1:22–24; Bauckham 1990, 73–78), what is significant is Eusebius’s claim that these Hebrew bishops were perfectly “orthodox”: not only could they boast of an apostolic succession going back to James, a relative of Jesus, but they received the knowledge of Christianity *in purity*. In addition, Eusebius uses the term “Hebrews” instead of “Jews” to denote the church of Jerusalem that existed up until the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

Scholars have often noted that in Eusebius’s writings the term “Hebrews” carries rather positive connotations, in contradistinction to the more polemically loaded label “Jews” (Ulrich 1999, 57–132). According to Eusebius, this Hebrew church of Jerusalem was replenished right after the Second Revolt by a Gentile populace, whose first bishop

was a certain non-Jew by the name of Marcus (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6.4). Thus, for Eusebius, the Bar Kokhba Revolt marks the end of a legitimate ethnic Hebrew episcopate in Jerusalem and its immediate replacement by a Gentile church.

Some have rightly questioned Eusebius's simplistic portrayal of an immediate, smooth transition from a Jewish church to a Gentile one. Such a simplistic historiographical description of the change in the church of Jerusalem during the days of Hadrian seems rather mechanical and simply ignores the complex social reality left behind by an entirely uprooted community, a vacuum that certainly would have only gradually been filled (Irshai 1993, 1:25–26). Equally significant is Eusebius's belief that after the Second Revolt the *legitimate* ethnic Jewish segment of the Christian church vanished: that is, those of Hebrew descent who had *truly* received the knowledge of Christ.

This positive portrait of the Jewish *ekklesia* of Jerusalem in the era before Bar Kokhba stands in stark contrast to Eusebius's description of the so-called heretical "Christian Jewish" sect known as the Ebionites (*Hist. eccl.* 3.27.1–6). By claiming that the legitimate Jewish form of expressing allegiance to Jesus had ceased by the time of Bar Kokhba, Eusebius indirectly denies any historical continuity between the Jewish *ekklesia* of Jerusalem and surviving "Jewish Christian heretics" from his own day. Whatever one makes of this tentative thesis, the surge in fourth- and fifth-century patristic references to both the Bar Kokhba Revolt and "Jewish Christian" sects in general is quite remarkable (cf. Boyarin 2004, 207–11).

#### **@H2 = Sulpicius Severus**

Sulpicius Severus, a Christian writer from the West who lived during the fourth to fifth centuries, interprets the expulsion of the Jewish followers of Jesus from Jerusalem in even more explicit providential terms than did Eusebius:

@Ext = And because the Christians were thought principally to consist of Jews (for the church at Jerusalem did not then have a priest except of the circumcision), he [Hadrian] ordered a cohort of soldiers to keep constant guard in order to prevent all Jews from approaching to Jerusalem. This, however, rather benefited the Christian faith, because almost all then believed in Christ as God while continuing in the observance of the law. Undoubtedly that was arranged by the

over-ruling care of the Lord, in order that the slavery of the law might be taken away from the liberty of the faith and of the church. In this way, Mark from among the Gentiles was then, first of all, bishop at Jerusalem (*Chron.* 2.31.3–6, in Roberts 1991).

For Sulpicius Severus, the outcome of the war allowed Christianity to free itself completely from the yoke of the Law, which Jewish followers of Jesus so stubbornly held onto. There is no lament on Severus's part over the loss of a distinctive Torah-observant Jewish wing within the *ekklesia*. Rather, he openly welcomes such an outcome as a result of divine providence. Like Eusebius, he obviously knows that Christianity originally sprang from a group of ethnic Jews who were Torah observant, much like some of the pockets of so-called Ebionites and Nazoreans surviving well into the fourth and fifth centuries. Eusebius, however, speaks in positive terms of the primitive Hebrew church in Jerusalem, whereas Severus views the church at this stage as imprisoned in its blind devotion to the Mosaic Torah, requiring divine intervention to be liberated from this Jewish "yoke."

Theological biases notwithstanding, if we seriously consider Eusebius's and Severus's assertions about the extinction of a Jewish *ekklesia* in Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Second Revolt, this would imply that the Romans applied no special policy in discriminating between Christian and non-Christian Jews during or immediately after the war. In this instance, Jewish followers of Jesus qualified as "Jewish" in the eyes of the Roman outsiders. Although the Roman authorities would occasionally discriminate between Jews and Christians (e.g., the localized persecution of Nero in Rome), and Roman policies even played a role in accelerating the process of the parting of the ways (Heemstra 2010), in this instance the same policy of discrimination was applied across the board to all Jews, whether sympathizers of Jesus or of Bar Kokhba. In the immediate aftermath of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, one could even speak of a momentary "converging of the ways" between Jewish disciples of Jesus and their Jewish compatriots: both types of Jews were led out of Jerusalem and Judea into exile and the slave markets (*Jerome, On Jeremiah* 6:31), where they suffered the same fate. Such are the effects of war, when individuals from different groups and strands of society are brought together, often against their own will and regardless of their previous associations and protocols.

### **@H2 = The Apocalypse of Peter**

The Apocalypse of Peter (*Apoc. Pet.*) is most pertinent for our study because of Richard Bauckham's claim that this work is a "Jewish Christian" book written *during* the Bar Kokhba Revolt (1998, 288). Most scholars agree that it was composed sometime in the first half of the second century (see Bauckham 1998, 4712–50). Schäfer, on the other hand, dismisses reading the *Apoc. Pet.* in light of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, pointing to the widespread literary phenomenon of apocalypses (1981, pp. 61–62).

Though Schäfer's skepticism is certainly warranted, I find the distinctive features spread throughout this particular apocalypse remarkable, because they do not fully correspond to themes of interest found in other writings of the same genre that normally attack the emperor and the imperial cult. Equally remarkable of this apocalypse is its unique use of the construct "House of Israel," which also appears in some of the Bar Kokhba letters (see Goodblatt 2006, 135–36; Eshel, Eshel, and Yardeni 2009). Bourgel takes this "ecclesiological" language as evidence that the author(s) of *Apoc. Pet.* discusse(s) issues that are viewed as internally affecting the Jewish People (2009, 331).

Bauckham identifies two themes in chapters 1 and 2 of this apocalypse: 1) the distinction between the true and false messiah and 2) the theme of martyrdom. For Bauckham, the false messiah described in the *Apoc. Pet.* cannot be a Roman emperor, because Christian apocalyptic texts always make much of the imperial cult when depicting emperors. The false messiah of the *Apoc. Pet.*, by contrast, does not demand worship (this complies with the portrait of Bar Kokhba suggested by Oppenheimer), but merely claims to be the messiah. As for the theme of martyrdom, the author develops this idea with the parable of the fig tree, as found in Matthew 24. Bauckham reads the fig tree in the *Apoc. Pet.* as representing the "house of Israel." The sprouting twigs of this fig tree herald the end of the world and represent the martyrs who will die at the hands of the false messiah.

Bauckham asserts that this theme can be more clearly understood if we situate the author and his readers at a time when the false messiah had already appeared and had put some "Jewish Christians" to death. Goodblatt agrees that the *Apoc. Pet.* refers to the persecution of followers of Jesus by Bar Kokhba, but offers an alternative hypothesis, suggesting that such a pursuit was the outcome of priestly influence upon Bar Kokhba.

Indeed, Goodblatt posits a strong priestly support for Bar Kokhba. It was, after all, in the interest of the priests to see the Temple rebuilt. And since only the priests were known to have previously persecuted followers of Jesus, Goodblatt maintains that they played an integral role in fermenting persecution against them during the Second Revolt (1983, 11).

Because nothing is said about the final outcome of this false messiah, Bauckham posits that the *Apoc. Pet.* was written during the Second Revolt, before it had ended, “when Bar Kochba’s military success against the Romans persuaded many Jews that he must be the Messiah and some Jewish Christians were being carried away by this enthusiasm for an enterprise apparently blessed with divine aid” (1998, 231). If we accept Bauckham’s thesis, it could be taken as partial evidence for the participation of at least some Jewish followers in the Bar Kokhba Revolt, because the author condemns certain individuals of his group as traitors and followers of a false messiah. Whether such followers of Jesus retained their faith in Jesus cannot be ascertained. Maybe some Jewish followers of Jesus did not actively support the war by bearing arms, but silently hoped that it could lead to the eschaton they were long awaiting. These remain speculations. In his study of the *Apoc. Pet.*, Buchholz suggests that some followers of Jesus may have viewed Bar Kokhba as Jesus the messiah returned or as a military precursor preparing the way for the second advent (1998, 286).

The controversy in the *Apoc. Pet.* also may have revolved around other issues besides messianism. In *Apoc. Pet.* 16, the author stresses that the true Temple is the one built by God, not by man, and then provides a description of the credentials of the true messiah. Bauckham reads the emphasis on the true Temple and true messiah as the author’s condemnation of Bar Kokhba’s attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (1998, 233). The position advocated in *Apoc. Pet.* against the Temple would not have been completely different from that of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, if, as some scholars believe, the latter was written with a “Jewish Christian” audience in mind in an attempt to dissuade them from remaining attached to the literal observance of the Torah (Claude-Mimouni 1998, 191).

In *Barnabas* there appears an enigmatic sentence that possibly alludes to the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem around the time of Hadrian, perhaps right before the revolt (*Barn.* 16:3–4). This obscure passage has been understood in various



ways, however, and it is difficult to make positive assertions about its historical referents (Horbury 1992). Nevertheless, it is significant that the author of *Barnabas* exerts himself considerably in his letter to spiritualize a variety of Mosaic commandments. Could this be because some Jewish followers of Jesus from his time, around the beginning of the second century, remained attached to the Torah?

Some Jewish followers of Jesus, because of their attachment to the literal observance of the Torah, might have sympathized with the goal to rebuild the Temple presumably promoted by Bar Kokhba, and the authors of both *Barnabas* and *Apoc. Pet.*, unhappy with such devotion, would have sought, each in his own way, to turn the gaze of the audience elsewhere.

### **@H1 = Conclusion**

The question about the “Jewish Christian” response to the Bar Kokhba Revolt has often been dominated by doctrinal considerations. This is due in part to the influence of the patristic authors, who, beginning with Justin Martyr, “christologized” the image of Bar Kokhba and interpreted his revolt against Rome in ways that served their ideological purposes. In one passage, however, Eusebius simply states that the followers of Jesus refused to participate in the war and were consequently persecuted by Bar Kokhba.

This led the late Israeli scholar Alon (1984, 2:628) to posit that Jewish followers of Jesus who did not support the war were not persecuted by Bar Kokhba because of their belief in Jesus as the true messiah, but because of their refusal—along with others—to participate in the war. In other words, they were persecuted as draft evaders. Abramski (1961, 76) argues that followers of Jesus did not participate in the revolt because of pacifism. This belief, however, did not prevent Christians in the long run from fighting in the Roman army (which eventually became Christian). Indeed, it is surprising that patristic authors (e.g., Tertullian, *De corona militis*) do not present the ideal of Christian pacifism as the reason for not joining the Roman army. Helgeland (1974) shows that the church fathers of the first three centuries objected to enlistment in the Roman army because of the idolatrous and polytheistic practices observed by the Roman legions.

There would of course be no such problem for Jewish followers of Jesus who wished to fight in a Jewish army under a Torah-observant leader such as Bar Kokhba. Ultimately, the specific reasons for the refusal on the part of some Jewish followers of

Jesus to support Bar Kokhba elude us. They could have stemmed from a cluster of christological, eschatological, ethical, and pragmatic considerations as well as social-political factors.

Hopefully this investigation has made a small contribution to the ongoing discussion on the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity. It is laudable that newer paradigms now exist for constructing a more nuanced relationship that avoid isolating a single event as the decisive moment for a complete schism between all Jews and Christians (see Reed and Becker 2007; Boyarin 2004; Lieu 2002). As far as we can determine from the extant primary sources, only Justin Martyr seems to have readily and quite rapidly appropriated the Bar Kokhba event to promote a particular Christian agenda. Other patristic authors viewed the Second Revolt as a determinative moment in “salvation history” only in hindsight, more than two centuries after the war occurred.

By contrast, during the immediate aftermath of the war relations between Jews and Christians probably did not radically and suddenly change everywhere. The only body in the Jesus movement to experience the immediate and dire effects of this terrible war was the Jewish *ekklesia* in Palestine, whose members—along with their fellow non-Christian Jews—were either dispersed or decimated by the Romans.

The reexamination of the Christian passages dealing with Bar Kokhba and the followers of Jesus has been fruitful in many respects. An inquiry that began with an interest in assessing the relationship of Jewish followers of Jesus to the Bar Kokhba Revolt proposed a more complicated scenario, more representative of the complex human experience (especially in times of war) and in harmony with the newer perspectives on the question of the “parting of the ways,” which are now well under way. It has hopefully become apparent that when we approach the relevant Christian sources, we learn just as much as, if not more, about the patristic authors and their impact on the formation of Jewish-Christian engagement as we do about the Bar Kokhba Revolt and the Jewish followers of Jesus of that time.

**@H1 = Notes**

1. This chapter is based on a paper written for a seminar on the Bar Kokhba Revolt presented by Aharon Oppenheimer during his stay in 2008–2009 as a fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Michigan. I would like to

thank my friend Jonathan Bourgel, a former doctoral student of Oppenheimer, for sharing the chapter from his dissertation entitled, “The Jewish Christians in the Storm of the Bar Kokhba Revolt” (2009). We are both delighted to have independently reached similar conclusions, namely, that the Bar Kokhba Revolt (at least during and in its immediate aftermath) should not be interpreted as a watershed in the so-called process of the “parting of the ways,” and that some Jewish followers of Jesus may have even participated in or at least supported the revolt. My research, more than Bourgel’s, tries to highlight the patristic refraction and reification of the Bar Kokhba event in the formation of Jewish and Christian identities.

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