

## II

### Iranian Thought and Later Judaism

#### 1. THE FOUNDING OF ZOROASTRIANISM

Truly there are two primal Spirits, and it is a matter of renown how these twins conflict, how in thought, word, and action, they are two, the good and the bad; and how those who act well have chosen rightly between these two, but not those who do evil; and how these two created life and not-life when they encountered one another; and how at the end the Worst Existence shall be for the deceitful, but Best Thought for the just.

*Zend Avesta, Yasna 30.3-4.*<sup>1</sup>

Many ideas we associate with later Judaism and Christianity, the immortality of the soul and a bodily resurrection, a Heaven and Hell, a last judgment, and an evil opponent of God, came from Persian Zoroastrianism during and after the Hebrew Exile. Zarathustra founded this religion about 1200 BCE, perhaps somewhat earlier, among the Iranians, at that time residents of south central Asia, Indo-European cattle herders in a well watered region of lakes and birch forests. A relatively settled people, they fought from horse-drawn chariots—only after the central Asian peoples bred horses with backs strong enough to ride did they become wide ranging nomads of the steppes. Zarathustra’s teachings traveled with them when they occupied eastern Iran around 1100 BCE. Perhaps in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, they converted the Magi, the hereditary priesthood of western Iran, and their faith spread westward to the Medes and Persians.<sup>2</sup>

The sacred book of the Zoroastrians is the *Zend Avesta*. The *Gathas*, comprising that portion of the

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Boyce (1984) 279–281—I have altered the translation for style, but, I think, retained the sense at every point. For my account of Zoroastrianism I rely chiefly on Boyce (1984) and (1992).

<sup>2</sup>Eliade (1978) 303–304, with many older scholars, follows a late tradition, placing his conversion of King Vishtaspa (or some other important event?) 258 years ‘before Alexander,’ presumably meaning before the fall of Persepolis. If that is right, Zarathustra was an Eastern Iranian born in 628 BCE. There are great difficulties with this date, however, and little reason to trust its source. Boyce (1984) 279–281, and (1992) 45, rejects it in favor of the date presented here, which is based on the language of the *Gathas*, and the society they describe. (Frye (1963) 50-52, argues for the traditional date, pointing out that the archaic features of the language of the *Gathas* do not enable us to date the text, since some dialects retain archaic features long after related dialects have ‘modernized’ considerably. If the traditional date is correct, Zarathustra would have lived in Eastern Iran.) For the conversion of the Magi, see Boyce (1992) 7. See Boyce (1979), and Malandra (1983) for a translation of central texts from early Zoroastrianism. It should be noted that the Iranians are an Aryan people, who, before they adopted the new religion, presumably worshiped the Aryan Gods that Zarathustra reacted against. It is hard to imagine that Zarathustra’s protestant views would have been of much interest to those worshipping Semitic gods further west. A protestant needs something to protest.

*Zend Avesta* composed by Zarathustra<sup>3</sup> himself, survived in oral transmission until the 4<sup>th</sup>, or even as late as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, before they were finally written down. This indicates an unbroken continuity of practice, since even one generation's gap in the oral tradition would have resulted in the loss of the liturgies.<sup>4</sup> Zarathustra appears in the *Gathas* as a prophetic reformer of traditional religion. He was perhaps a member of a hereditary guild of priests like those who composed and preserved the *Vedas*, but opposed to those priests worshiping Indra and the Daevas. He insisted on the goodness of a supreme God, and the availability of that God's help to all who seek virtue, regardless of access to magical ceremonial. Eventually finding a patron in the chieftain Vishtaspa, Zarathustra died an old man, his religion firmly established among Vishtaspa's people.<sup>5</sup>

The *Gathas* teach a supreme God, Ahura Mazda, creator of all things, both spiritual and material. This God thought creation into existence through the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> first producing things in an immaterial state, and then providing this immaterial world with a material existence.<sup>7</sup> Holy and righteous, Ahura Mazda dwells as absolute lord in his kingdom beyond the reach of evil, a kind and generous ruler of his creation. He is father and creator of seven other beings, namely Holy Spirit, Truth or Justice, Good Thought (thought in accord with Truth), Dominion (rule in accord with Truth), Devotion (obedience to rule in accord with Truth), Health, and Immortality. These seven are all qualities of Ahura Mazda conceived as individual beings, of "one will" with

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<sup>3</sup>"Zoroaster" is the Greek form of the prophet's name.

<sup>4</sup>The *Gathas* are found in the liturgy for the main Zoroastrian act of worship, the *Yasna*. They are numbered *Yasna* 28–34, 43–51, and 53. For translations, see M. Henning, *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (1952), and S. Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathustra*, Acta Iranica 8 (Leiden 1975). The exact preservation of the *Gathas* in the oral tradition over a period of centuries is paralleled in the oral preservation of the *Vedas*, the hymns of the cults of the Daevas, in India. The phenomenon is accounted for by the belief in a magical power contained in the hymns, a power that would be lost if any deviation from the correct text was allowed, and the presence of a hereditary guild of priests who made a living from the recitation of the hymns in the rituals.

<sup>5</sup>A later tradition tells us he was killed by the worshipers of the Daevas while making the fire sacrifice (Eliade (1978) 304–305, 316). An earlier tradition holds that Zarathustra was killed when his patron, Vishtaspa, was defeated by opposing chieftains. The father of Cyrus the Great of Persia, "Hystaspes" in Herodotus's Greek, is named after the original Vishtaspa, and so the official Persian cult must already have been Zoroastrian when he was born. Boyce (1992) 14 finds no reason in the earliest texts to suppose that Zarathustra died a violent death at all.

<sup>6</sup>"Holy Spirit" translates "Spenta Mainyu," where "spenta" means "possessing power and inclined to aid." It is sometimes translated as "bounteous," but came to be applied only to the divine, like our "holy," which originally meant "mighty." Boyce (1979) 22.

<sup>7</sup>The idea is no doubt rooted in the notion that Ahura Mazda conceives the thing in his heart, and then brings it into material existence, an idea that is found, for instance, in the Ancient Egyptian *Memphite Theology*. It is picked up in Judaism in the Platonist Philo, who has God creating the world of Forms before he creates the actual material world corresponding to it. It is this notion that makes it so natural to treat Platonic Forms as Ideas in the mind of God.

Him.<sup>8</sup> Each of these qualities is associated with an element of creation of which it is the ruling spirit. The Holy Spirit is most closely identified with Ahura Mazda himself, Dominion with the sky, Justice is found in fire, Good Thought in cattle, Devotion in earth, Health in water, and Immortality in plants. A good and just man shares in these qualities, so that his good qualities derive directly from participation in Ahura Mazda.<sup>9</sup> These seven are Amesha Spentas, Holy Spirits, along with several other deities subordinate to and made by Ahura Mazda, including Hearkening, Recompense, and the other Ahuras, Mithra and Varuna.<sup>10</sup> Hearkening (Sraosha) served as the mediator between Ahura Mazda and men. He was said to protect the body just as the Wise Lord protects the soul. He never sleeps, engaging the Daevas at night, when they are most active, to keep them from men, and he cannot be deceived. It is Sraosha who conducts the souls of the dead to the Bridge of the Requiter, where they meet Mithra and Rashnu to be judged.

The world as we know it is divided, according to the *Gathas*, between Truth and Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and the Lie, Truth's twin, Angra Mainyu, the Destructive spirit, on the other.<sup>11</sup> The Destructive Spirit chooses by its nature to do the worst possible things, and, like Ahura Mazda, is

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<sup>8</sup>Often ancient polytheism conceives the powers and qualities of higher gods as lower gods, indeed, any power at all might be viewed as a god, in the way that the power of an oath becomes Varuna, who can dwell within things as either a favorable or inimical force. See the remarks on these matters in Part I, Chapter 1, and Boyce (1992) 70–71.

<sup>9</sup>Boyce (1992) 67–69.

<sup>10</sup>Boyce (1979) 21–24; (1984) 284–285. These doctrines are from the “Gatha of Seven Chapters,” *Gatha Haptanhaiti*, in the *Zend Avesta*, the earliest material we have for the religion aside from Zarathustra's own gathas. Boyce (1992) 87–97 argues that this material was composed by Zarathustra himself. Mithra and Varuna are old deities who survive in the *Vedas*, and in other Iranian religions, Mithra embodying the power of a contracted agreement, Varuna the power of an oath. Some scholars say Zarathustra's monotheism, as revealed in the *Gathas*, is toned down here with the reintroduction of the other Ahuras in subordinate roles. But even if the *Gatha Haptanhaiti* is not by Zarathustra himself, it is probable that the other Ahuras were always recognized, though Zarathustra's theology no doubt stressed monotheism more than the common believer did. Ahura Mazda even turns out to have wives in the *Gatha Haptanhaiti*, who are sometimes identified with the Earth, sometimes with the Waters, and though he is not associated with any natural phenomena by Zarathustra himself in his surviving *Gathas*, Ahura Mazda is here associated with the Sun, fire, and light. The *Gatha Haptanhaiti* lacks the intolerant tones of the more personal Gathas attributed to the founder himself in the *Zend Avesta*, failing even to mention Angra Mainyu, and, aside from being unsigned, as it were, is also in prose, but its language is the oldest Avestan, and its doctrine is entirely consistent with the *Gathas*. Moreover, as the unvarying core of the central act of worship, around which priests improvised their prayers, but which was never itself altered in a single syllable, it is likely to have been instituted by the founder himself.

<sup>11</sup>The opposition here is between Angra Mainyu (later called Ahriman) and Ahura Mazda. Though Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu are said to be twins, and Spenta Mainyu is said to be the son of Ahura Mazda, it is not to be concluded that Ahura Mazda is also the father of Angra Mainyu. Spenta Mainyu is but Ahura Mazda himself under a certain aspect, that is, considered as good and benevolent, and so as creator. Angra Mainyu is nowhere said to be Ahura Mazda's son. The sense in which the two are twins then is this—they are coeval, and opposed as creative and destructive, good and evil. They do not have a common father. Boyce (1984) 283 makes reference to modern attempts to make both Spirits sons of Ahura Mazda, and Eliade (1978) 310 takes that line.

associated with subordinate deities, including the Daevas.<sup>12</sup> The uniqueness of Zarathustra's religious vision lies in his emphasis on this dualism of good and evil, Truth and the Lie. The world in its spiritual state (as thought by Ahura Mazda) was perfect and immune to attack, but in its material state it is vulnerable. So Angra Mainyu assaulted it as soon as it was rendered material. He broke into the bottom of the solid sphere of rock that forms the boundary of the world, turned the water salt as he moved through it toward the land, rendered much of the land desert, withered the primal Plant, killed the Bull and the First Man, and polluted fire with smoke. The divine spirits then spread the essence of the Plant throughout the world in clouds and rain, so that plants grew up everywhere, and cycled the seed of the Bull and Man through the sun and moon, so that it too fell to earth in the rains and gave rise to cattle and human beings.<sup>13</sup> Eventually all evil will be destroyed, even Angra Mainyu himself, and a perfect material world will endure forever.<sup>14</sup> Creatures are made so they may choose between the two Spirits, and human beings are rewarded or punished in accord with their choice, a choice for evil condemning one to utter destruction.<sup>15</sup> Upon death a person enters the immaterial state once more, and is judged, going to a hell or a heaven, or possibly a neutral place like the underworld of the Greeks.<sup>16</sup> At the end of time, when Ahura Mazda has won the struggle, all the dead will go through an ordeal in which they pass through a river of molten metal, which will seem to the righteous like warm milk, and while it will purge the righteous of any remnants of evil, it will utterly destroy the unrighteous.<sup>17</sup> (This harsh doctrine later changed,

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<sup>12</sup>Boyce (1979) 19–21; (1984) 285.

<sup>13</sup>One who knows Plato cannot help but see all this as an image of the multiple instantiation in actuality of the perfect Forms of things found in the mind of Ahura Mazda. The many participants in a unified Form are always imperfect, so the breaking up of the unity of Man, Plant, and the Bull is reasonably associated with the introduction of evil into the world, which occurs as soon as the Forms are realized in actuality, and no longer merely conceived. It is tempting to trace the parallels between Plato and Zoroastrianism to a common Indo-European view of things pre-dating both.

<sup>14</sup>Boyce (1979) 25–26; Boyce (1992) 73–78.

<sup>15</sup>The choice made by creatures is genuinely important, not only to themselves, but to the outcome of the struggle, for Zarathustra conceived that the power of Ahura Mazda, like that of the other gods, depended in part on the devotions and ethical behavior of his followers. This conception is also found in the *Vedas*. Boyce (1992) 74.

<sup>16</sup>The notion of a favorable afterlife, available to those who purified themselves in appropriate ritual, existed already, and is witnessed in the *Vedas*, but Zarathustra added an ethical dimension to the picture, insisting that the necessary purification was ethical, and allowed that women as well as men would share in it. In particular, the sensual maidens that were supposed to accompany each man into the afterlife were transformed by Zarathustra into one's own soul, which would meet one at the place of judgment in the shape it had taken due to one's deeds during life on earth. The virtuous would find a beautiful woman who would guide them across the bridge that led to the place of blessedness, which would be broad and easy to cross, while the vicious would find an ugly hag who would destroy any possibility of getting safely across the bridge, which would become narrow as a razor's edge. Boyce (1992) 76.

<sup>17</sup>Boyce (1992) 77.

and it came to be supposed that, though the evil went to a hell, they escaped eventually after revolting from Ahriman, and were purified with the faithful in the river of molten metal on the final day.)<sup>18</sup> The world will be restored to its original state before the introduction of evil, but the multiplicity of people, plants and animals will be retained, and an eternity of happiness will be spent by human beings here on the now perfected Earth.<sup>19</sup>

The sort of polytheism Zarathustra faced recognized gods behind all natural forces, including those, such as warfare, that work for ill. Zarathustra conceived God as perfectly ethical, and so could not recognize the gods of such forces as aspects of his Ahura Mazda, and was faced with the task of explaining how such evil forces could be present if his God in fact ran the world. In particular, He set himself against the worship of the Daevas, a group of gods who were to become the deities of Hinduism, the Ahuras being reduced to the status of demons (“Asuras”) in India, where Hinduism came to dominate the scene. The Daevas are the younger generation of gods, which superseded the older generation, much as Zeus and his fellows overcame Saturn’s generation in Greek mythology. The older gods in such a scheme generally reflect creative power and ancient, anarchic wisdom, while also displaying a monstrous character suited to the age before order came to the world, while the younger gods are warriors full of youthful vigor, and the ordering wisdom of the practical politician. So the Hindu scheme is the usual thing, but in Iran it went the opposite way, due to Zarathustra’s influence, and the Asuras became the gods, the Daevas the demons. Zarathustra repudiated the warrior mentality characteristic of worshipers of the Daevas, promoting to exclusive Godhood Ahura Mazda, the wise old creator god, originally the father of the Asuras.<sup>20</sup>

Zarathustra opposed the worship of the Daevas in part because of the drunkenness and riot associated with their ceremonial, and the wholesale slaughter of cattle in sacrifice to them, which indicated the evil nature of these deities.<sup>21</sup> He replaced the sacrificial altar with the fire-altar, where a pure and perpetual fire is maintained and venerated. (The practice is a development of the Indo-European cult of the hearth fire

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<sup>18</sup>Boyce (1992) 143. The change in doctrine came about under the Sassanian, Shapur II (309–379).

<sup>19</sup>Boyce (1979) 27–28; (1984) 284; (1992) ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup>I depend on Boyce (1992) 38–39, and ch. 3, esp. 59, who gives a somewhat variant account making no mention of the two generations of the gods. For the origins of the dualistic conception of Zarathustra see Boyce (1992) 72–73. In *Yasna* 29 and elsewhere in the *Gathas* it is made apparent that Zarathustra experienced himself the terrors of a cattle raid, and Boyce suggests that reflection on this event and how it could have been permitted, even fostered, by the gods, led to his dualism.

<sup>21</sup>Zoroastrianism allowed the sacrifice of cattle, perhaps for the sake of the less enlightened, but not to the Daevas, and only in moderation and with proper ritual dignity.

reflected, for instance, in the Roman worship of Vesta.) Fire is the abode of Truth and Justice, and it is through an ordeal of fire and molten metal at the end of days that humanity will be judged and purified. Ideally, one makes no sacrifice to Fire beyond veneration, a “sacrifice” with the function of raising one’s thoughts to Justice, that is, giving oneself over to the Spirit inhabiting the fire.<sup>22</sup> The other of the major rituals was the *haoma* sacrifice, representing the sacrifice of plant life. Here the “drink of immortality” was taken (in anticipation of the drink to be given to virtuous human beings in the last sacrifice when Angra Mainyu was at last defeated), and the officiant was expected to recover the state of purity enjoyed before his spiritual essence was mixed with matter, occasioning Ahriman’s attack on the good creation. Hence the ceremony contributed to the redemption of the world through the redemption of the celebrant.<sup>23</sup> Zarathustra viewed religious ritual as a purification of the soul, filling it with the various Holy Spirits of Ahura Mazda, and driving out the Destructive Spirits of Angra Mainyu.

Zarathustra, like the Buddhists and the Jains within the Hindu milieu, rejected the system of caste duties and the use of violence to enforce the rule of the upper castes. In their place he envisioned a single set of moral duties, enjoining peace and non-violence, binding on everyone without exception, in the light of which the existing social order might well be subject to criticism and reform. Zarathustra pictures world history as a struggle between good and evil, and a struggle of finite duration, so that the success of one’s individual moral efforts during the time of struggle make a real contribution to the eventual victory of the good.

## 2. MITHRAISM

The worship of the Daevas seems to have been regarded by the Zoroastrians as a matter of propitiating violent and evil deities, perhaps even enlisting their aid. It is unlikely that any of the Daeva worshipers themselves took this view of their practices—they no doubt thought the Daevas good—but Mithraism is another story. Doubts about the power of the good God in this world seems to have led the Mithra cult to

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<sup>22</sup>Eliade (1978) 314–315. *Zend Avesta*, *Yasna* 43.9. One must be purified to perform the sacrifices, which involves, for instance, being free from anger. So a meditation in which one takes on the beneficial states of the Godhead is necessary. Boyce (1992) 67–68. Of course, some material sacrifice is necessary to maintain the fire, and so offerings of wood and the like were made.

<sup>23</sup>Eliade (1978) 315. Zoroastrianism, as we have observed, seems to be reflected in places in the thought *Upanishads*. So the doctrine of reincarnation in its earliest form, with its reference to the spirit stuff that comes down in rain and enters a plant, and so enters the man who eats the plant to be reborn as his child, perhaps has this source. Note that meditation separates the spirit stuff from matter, a pattern we find in Zoroastrianism, and the Zoroastrian hostility to the Daevas is also present, for it is from their world that one is released by meditation.

sacrifice to the evil Ahriman, who was viewed as the legitimate god of this world, in order to ensure one's well-being here, as well as one's escape to another world, where the good God ruled, after one's death. The cult originated, it seems, in Iran under the Parthians in the second century BCE, and a Hellenized version of it became established in the Roman Empire, apparently first in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE among soldiers and functionaries stationed and recruited in the East, though it probably never embraced more than one or two percent of the population.<sup>24</sup> The religion in the Roman Empire had no doubt become Hellenized, with deletions and accretions, and an alteration of the sense of much that was original in it. Our knowledge of the doctrine of the religion is quite uncertain, based as it is on surviving art work and graffiti in the meeting houses of the cult, not on any written documents, except those of the Zoroastrians, of course, which, though a religion ancestral to Mithraism, is nonetheless very different from it. Cumont, an important early scholar of this cult, likened the situation to reconstructing Christian beliefs from the *Old Testament* and the artwork of a few Gothic cathedrals.

Working from what evidence we have, the central event in the Mithraic view of the world was the ritual slaying of a bull by Mithras, who seems to have restored the world by this sacrifice. Originally, it seems, a god the Romans identified with Saturn made the world, represented as Earth and a Sky supported by Atlas. The three Destinies (the Parcae) ruled the world. A god represented by Jupiter in the syncretistic myth of the Romans succeeds Saturn, inheriting his weapon, the thunderbolt, with which he destroys snake-headed giants who try to take over the creation. The evil behind the giants continues its efforts, though, perhaps creating a drought, and Mithras, arising miraculously from a rock, handles this subsequent challenge to the good. The Bull killed by Mithras apparently had taken into itself the life-giving moisture, which was cycled into him through the Moon. Mithras captured the bull, forced him into a cave, and slew him there, releasing the moisture and bringing nature alive again. Afterwards there was a feast with the Sun-God, all sitting on the hide of the slaughtered animal. This feast is represented in the cult by a communal meal, apparently held on Sunday, in the Mithraeum, a meeting house decorated as the cave in which the bull was killed, and representing the universe. It seems that Mithras displaces the Sun God due to his heroic deed, and he is represented as the Invincible Sun in Mithraic dedications. Apparently the Sun did submission to Mithras, and then was crowned, and this is the act reproduced in a soldier's initiation into the cult, in which he stands beneath the sacrificed bull to be inducted with its blood, and afterwards is crowned.

All of this is represented in the cultic images in connection with the Zodiac and the seven days of the

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<sup>24</sup>For the evidence on this and the rest of my treatment of Mithraism, see Turcan (1996) Chapter 4 on Mithraism.

week, and the image of a winged god wrapped round with a snake with the Zodiac on it, and the head of lion. This God may represent Time, from which all things arose and to which they will return, indicating a sacred cycle of events endlessly repeated, and a Stoic view of God's providence. Conservative scholars, trying not to outrun the evidence, have for the most part settled on such a view. But there is one statue from York with the name "Arimanius" inscribed under it, and Plutarch makes Ahriman the lord of the underworld.<sup>25</sup> So perhaps we have here the Lord of this world, an underworld power to which a sacrifice is made (in a cave) to prevent his destruction of the natural world and save the cultist from his power.

According to the Zoroastrians, it was Ahriman that killed the primal Ox. (Such a destructive act would not have been committed by any ally of Ahura Mazda.) The Ox's murder backfired, though, as Ahriman's violence so often does, for its Seed rose to the moon, and falling as rain, gave rise to all good animal life. In Zoroastrianism, Mithra was the defender of the bodies of men against Ahriman and the Lie, and the defender of the sanctity of contracts. He was very much the young warrior accompanying the wise father. The Romans, of course, would not have had the horror of killing cattle that possessed the Zoroastrians, and they may have reinterpreted the old stories. Or, more likely, the original story of the sacrifice performed by the young Sun-God was reinterpreted by the Zoroastrians. It is interesting that the 'wolf-species' made by Ahriman in Zoroastrian mythology after his initial attempts at total destruction had failed, noxious forms of life such as cats, lions, and snakes, are represented drinking the blood and fluids of the Bull in Mithraic depictions of the sacrifice. This seems originally to represent an attempt by Ahriman to blunt the effects of the sacrifice, redirecting the resources provided for the good to his evil creations, but to Mithraism it may represent Ahriman's acceptance of the sacrifice made to him.

If that reading of the sacrifice is right, Mithraism probably imagined that Ahriman tries to keep souls here so that they can not rise to Heaven, and that he is the lord of this world, the source of material wealth and worldly success (as Pluto is the god of worldly success, since precious metals are found underground). The bull sacrifice made to him would be for the sake of these things, and also to gain the power to leave this world after our deaths. (Perhaps Ahriman is greedy enough for the life-giving blood to accept it despite the fact that it also empowers men eventually to escape from him.) It is clear that the initiates went through seven levels of attainment, representing a passage through the seven spheres (Sun, Moon and the five Planets), after which they enter the eighth, the sphere of the fixed stars. It may be that Yima originally tricked the underworld God into

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<sup>25</sup>See Turcan (1996) 232 for the evidence, and Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 47. Pursuing once more parallels to Plato, one might see the Fall into time as the source of evil, and so identify Time and temporal process with Ahriman.

accepting this sacrifice, and Mithras, informed by Yima of the sacrifice and urged by the Sun God to perform it again, manages to carry it out despite Ahriman's attempts to prevent it. Armed with the initiation and the agreement of Ahriman which Mithras, the God of the Contract, forces him to keep, one can rise through the spheres to be reborn in the Heavens, escaping his dreary underworld abode.

This view of Ahriman, and the practice of his propitiation, was foreign to the Zoroastrians. They held that Ahriman had invaded the creation of Ahura Mazda and attempted to kill everything in it, and that he certainly exercised no legitimate sovereignty over it. But in Roman Mithraism, if this reconstruction of it is right, Ahriman became a Gnostic Evil One, rightful lord of this world who held the keys to Heaven, and had to be propitiated if the soul was to be allowed to escape to Heaven. He was identified with fate, with the head of a lion, a snake wrapped about him, and his body covered with the signs of the Zodiac. He had become the Prince of this World.

The absolute sovereignty of God is also insisted on by later Christians, faced in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* with a similar story. There, Christ tricks Satan out of his right to the souls of human sinners for his underworld, now converted to the Hell in which God punishes him, by getting him to lay an unjust claim to Christ, who was sinless. This act somehow voided Satan's right on human beings as well. It may be that the Mithraic story holds that Ahriman originally obtained his right on human souls because of the sin of Yima, and the birth of Mithras from a rock, which is often depicted, is a device to ensure that Mithras himself will not inherit this primal sin from his parents, and so will have the right to oppose Ahriman. If so, elements of the notion of original sin, and the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, one of the functions of which is to prevent Jesus from becoming contaminated by original sin, may have entered Christianity from a Mithraic background.

The mythical background of the ox sacrifice in Mithraism is confused in our sources. In some older versions it was carried out by Yima, the first man (perhaps the twin of Mithra), who, after reigning in a golden age, went to dwell beneath the earth, and will return at the end of time.<sup>26</sup> The sacrifice was later forgotten, and had to be reestablished by Mithra. In the pagan myths that preceded Zoroastrianism, apparently related to early Mesopotamian stories recounted in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Yima's disappearance under the earth with the best of men and animals is the result of human sinfulness, and deprives us of our immortality. Whatever brought about Yima's withdrawal, it is the task of Mithras to undo the harm wrought by it. Perhaps the torch-bearing twins who accompany Mithras in the Roman monuments are Yima, as he was when, in one version of

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<sup>26</sup>Zarathustra takes Yima to have instituted the sacrifice of bulls and oxen, offering it to the Daevas to propitiate them, which was the first sin in the world, though, as we have seen, good came of it.

the story, he was sawn in two by a usurper, the Dragon King, and the two halves had healed. A visit to Yima in his underground kingdom may be represented here, during which Mithra is encouraged to restore the world by a re-inauguration of the bull sacrifice. In these Roman scenes, the initiate stands beneath the bull in the sacrifice, and, receiving the healing blood, is saved.

Does Mithraism, then, represent a bastardization of the Zoroastrian world view, substituting a kind of collaborationist attitude toward evil, even if the ultimate aim is to escape from it through trickery? This picture of the religion is probably too infected with later Christian attitudes toward Paganism in general, reinterpreted as Satanism, to be trusted. We should note that providing resources to evil if we are to nourish the good is often unavoidable. One can often, for instance, distribute charity only through institutions and governments that siphon off part of the funds for purposes questionable at best, and one must often seek the help of powerful people without worrying over much about the sources of their power, if one is to act at all. One might justify such behavior by noting frankly that one can only do what is possible, and to do nothing, so as to remain untainted by the corruption that attaches to the use of worldly resources, is more self-righteous than charitable. One might also see it as a kind of trickery, for it is the good that is done that has a future, and the bad that is done represents only a short-term gain for evil, bound to be lost again in the end. Indeed, one might see it as a kind of divine trickery, drawing good from evil despite itself. One might even draw good from evil motives, getting a rich man to give for the sake of his reputation, say, perhaps even with the expectation of the beginning of the rich man's reformation once he experiences what it is to help others. Mithraism seems not to have aimed at simple worldly success, but escape from this world into a better one, and if the creatures of Ahriman drink at the sacrifice of the bull, that may be permitted only because there is no other way to get the world-restoring sacrifice performed. The Zoroastrian insistence that there be no compromise and no collusion is perhaps noble, but perhaps it is only prideful, ignoring the prospects of reforming bad persons if one can once get them to do good actions, even for questionable motives, and refusing to do the works of love out of a prideful grasping after personal purity. Mithraism and Zoroastrianism certainly present different approaches to the way in which good and evil are intertwined in the world, but it is not obvious which has the better strategy for seeking the good, or even which has the nobler motives.

## 3. ZOROASTRIANISM UNDER THE ACHAEMENIDS

... they call the whole circle of heaven Zeus, and to him they offer sacrifices on the highest peaks of the mountains; they sacrifice also to the Sun and Moon and earth and fire and water and winds.

Herodotus, *Histories* I 131.

Under the Achaemenids, the Persian rulers who fought the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and restored the Hebrews to their homeland, a catholic Zoroastrianism prevailed, supported by the King of Kings. The practice of exposing the bodies of the dead to be consumed by birds was not adopted (at least not by the royal family), but tombs were carefully designed to prevent any escape of pollution from the dead body, and other practices peculiar to the Zoroastrians were closely followed. Worship was carried out in the open air, with invocations of the guardian Amesha Spentas of the seven creations—Dominion ruling the sky, Health water, Devotion the earth, Immortality plants, Good Thought animals, Holy Spirit man, and Truth fire. The duty of praying in the presence of fire at appointed times each day was recognized.<sup>27</sup>

The Achaemenids were tolerant of others' religious practices. They seem to have come to view their own faith less as a universal religion to be spread to all mankind, than a mark of their national identity, and perhaps took most other religions to worship Ahura Mazda or the Amesha Spentas, though conceiving them in various ways wrongly. They also generally attempted to gain the good will of those exiled by the Assyrians by restoring them, when they could, to their homeland. Thus, Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Palestine and reestablish the worship of Yahweh, and it seems likely that at least some Persians saw the worship of Yahweh as a worship of Ahura Mazda under another name. The growth of Jewish purity laws, and their extension to the everyday household affairs of the layman, may have been connected to Zoroastrian practices, for the Zoroastrians conceived the good world of Ahura Mazda to be under continual assault by Ahriman, whose weapons included dirt, mold, rust, and decay, and took cleanliness as an essential part of religious duty,

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<sup>27</sup>Boyce (1984) 285–7. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the Persian Wars, notes the sacrifices at high places in the open air to the Amesha Spentas (I 131), the sacrifices conducted by private individuals accompanied by a Magus (I 132), the reverence for fire (but nothing of the cult practices involving fire, III 16) and for flowing fresh water (I 138), the peculiar mode of disposing of the dead and the habit of killing, whenever possible, the creatures made by Ahriman (I 140, though the remark that the Magi kill everything but dogs and men must reflect a confusion between the killing of noxious creatures and the sacrifice of good creatures). He also notes a strong regard for the truth (I 138), and the conviction that a person's bad actions should be balanced against his or her good actions before punishment is assigned (I 137). In addition to Herodotus, there is the evidence of Plutarch concerning Zoroastrian doctrine in *Of Isis and Osiris* 46, which is summarized from 4<sup>th</sup> century works by Theopompus and Eudemus of Rhodes. For this see Boyce (1992) 129–130.

following an elaborate code of ritual purity. Nehemiah, a member of the court, would have had to observe this cleanliness code to keep from polluting his Zoroastrian companions, and it may be that the imposition of the old ritual purity of the priests of Yahweh on the whole nation was suggested in part by upper class familiarity with Persian practices. It must be observed, however, that there was also an internal rationale sufficient to explain the Jewish development, namely the conception that the whole nation must take on the duties of the priests of Yahweh under the new conditions of the Exile.

We can see Persian influence on the Jews not only in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, but also in the Priestly Source in the Bible. So the creation account in *Genesis* 1 associates the Spirit of God with the act of creation, and it is hard to escape the parallel between the seven creations of Ahura Mazda, sky, water, earth, plants, animals, human beings, and fire, and the creative acts of Yahweh. Again, the earliest signs among the Jews of a belief in a favorable life after death seems to be found in *Isaiah* 26:19, and the way in which it is put there, referring to the bodies of the dead rising again from the earth, echoes the Zoroastrian belief in the resurrection of the body in the last days.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is hard to imagine the Zoroastrian apocalyptic beliefs associated with the final victory of Ahura Mazda not infecting the Jewish milieu. The Zoroastrian notion was that the earth would be made perfect, as it was when first created, something, it had come to be believed, to be accomplished by a world savior, the Saoshyant, who would be born of a virgin mother (by the seed of the prophet himself), and, who, coming from the East, would lead the forces of good in the last conflict with the forces of evil.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. JUDAISM UNDER THE PERSIANS

Then I, Daniel, looked on and saw two others standing, one on the near bank of the river, one on the other. One said to the man dressed in linen who was standing further up the stream, "How long until these wonders take place?"... he raised his right hand had his left to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever, "A time and two times, and half a time; and all these things are going to happen when he who crushes the power of the holy people meets his end." I listened but did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what is to be the outcome?" "Daniel," he said, "go away: these words

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<sup>28</sup>Boyce (1984) 298–301. Aside from Yasna 30.7, there is ancient evidence that Theopompus, born about 380 B.C.E., ascribed this teaching to Zarathustra.

<sup>29</sup>Boyce (1979) 42–43; (1984) 301. See also Shaul Saked, "Iranian influence on Judaism," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. He notes that the listing of good and evil spirits ranged over against one another is found in Zoroastrian and Jewish apocalyptic literature, but not elsewhere in the Near East.

are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the End. Many will be cleansed, made white and purged; the wicked will go on doing wrong; the wicked will never understand; the learned will understand... go away and rest; and you will arise for your share at the end of time.

*Daniel 12:5–13.*

After the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple, Jewish intellectual life took its lead from the now omnipresent Scripture. The Hebrews had become the Jews, a post-classical people looking to a mythic and ever receding past embodied in their canonical books. Jewish authors could be original enough, but they either modeled their works directly on the *Tanak* (so I *Maccabees*), or worked their ideas into scriptural paraphrases and commentaries. The latter could be quite fanciful, for as long as the sacred text was there to guarantee the preservation of tradition, there was no harm in a little speculation. Indeed, it was generally accepted that scripture might carry any number of meanings, so that equally valid but conflicting interpretations were quite possible. All sorts of allegorical readings, folk tales and legends could be presented in the commentaries for what they were worth, simply because they were interesting, and not because of the author's conviction of their absolute truth.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, essentially new ideas, such as those gained from contact with the Persians on such topics as the afterlife, could be presented in this supplemental literature and establish themselves in the commentary tradition, even though absent from the *Bible* itself.

In the realm of prophecy, everything was changed by the closure of the canon.<sup>31</sup> Those works that became canonical emphasized the unity of Israel, and the Prophets of Israel were the prophets of the whole nation. But in the Hellenistic era many religious groups arose within Israel that saw themselves as the remnant of the faithful, in opposition to the rest of the Jews, though still seeking their conversion. The unfaithful Jews were typically represented as the dupes, or willing allies, of Satan and his demons in a war against God. The success of Israel against foreign powers hinged entirely on the outcome of this internal war, for foreign nations could conquer Israel only if God wished to use them to punish his people. It became dogma that there were no longer prophets in the classical sense, and those who called people to repentance and reform, preaching apocalyptic hopes of God's victory in this war, did not regard themselves as prophets. Nor were their works, since they were perceived as divisive, taken into the Canon, though in truth the work of the old prophets was

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<sup>30</sup>Cohen (1987) 192–195.

<sup>31</sup>Cohen (1987) 195–199.

often divisive enough, and looked unifying only to later generations that could view themselves as the heirs of God's party, no matter who they were.

The new prophecy took the shape of apocalypse. In Greek *apokalyptein* means "to reveal or uncover," and an apocalypse is the revelation of some mystery by an angel or other supernatural source, but not, as with the prophets in the days of old, by God Himself. Here the angel takes the part of the prophet bearing the Spirit of Yahweh, and the purported writer of the apocalypse (almost always some ancient worthy, such as Enoch or Noah) is but a witness of the angel's actions and words. The actual symbolic actions performed by the prophets are here entirely given up for allegorical and symbolic visions, though these find their pattern in such visions as those of Ezekiel. What is revealed may include cosmological lore (*Enoch*, written in the third century BCE), or tablets and such stored up in heaven (the book of *Jubilees*), but always, in apocalypses written after the profanation of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BCE), it includes God's plan for human history and the eventual salvation of his people. *Daniel* (ca. 160 BCE) is the prototype of this sort of work, with its extreme and fantastic images and their interpretations, and its assumption that God has planned out every event in advance. The scheme that became standard postulated four empires, each more evil than the last, and, when the last had set afoot a great persecution of God's chosen people, the final salvation by God's armies.<sup>32</sup> *Daniel* also includes the appearance of an anointed one, who shall be removed at the critical moment, "with no one to take his part," followed by a Son of Man (or One Like a Man) who comes from the heavens and is given everlasting glory by Yahweh, and the resurrection of the virtuous dead in the last days, so that they may gain their reward. The imitation of Zoroastrian models in all of this is evident. That the Good overcomes the Evil not through violence or force, but through good and loving action and wise and patient suffering, is a Zoroastrian theme. But the Jews, and, later, Christians, did not entirely absorb the message—for them it seems right that God should pull off a *coup de main* of the sort that one might have expected from Yahweh, the God of might who supported David in his wars, after the suffering of his servant has established his right. For a Zoroastrian the forces of evil consume themselves when God's preservative force prevents them from consuming others, and Ahura Mazda never employs violence. In any case, the message here for a Jew awaiting God's salvation is not to expect one's virtue or sacrifices to be rewarded here and now. Only in God's good time would the unjust oppression be ended, but if one waited patiently (perhaps taking no political or military action on one's own), there would be salvation in the end.

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<sup>32</sup>So *Daniel* 2 and 7. For all this, see Grant (1987) 212–217.

**5. JUDEA UNDER THE GREEKS: THE MACCABEANS,  
THE DISPERSION AND HELLENISTIC JEWISH LITERATURE**

Alexander of Macedon, son of Philip, had come to the land of Kittim and defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes... so he advanced to the ends of the earth, plundering nation after nation, the earth grew silent before him, and his ambitious heart swelled with pride... But the time came when Alexander took to his bed, in the knowledge that he was dying. He summoned his comrades, noblemen who had been brought up with him from his youth, and divided his kingdom among them while still alive... From these there grew a sinful offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus... It was then that there emerged from Israel a set of renegades who led the people astray. "Come," they said, "let us reach an understanding with the pagans surrounding us, for since we separated ourselves from them many misfortunes have overtaken us."... and a number of people eagerly approached the king, who authorized them to practice pagan observances. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, such as the pagans have, disguised their circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant, submitting to the heathen rule as willing slaves of impiety.

*I Maccabees 1:1–16.*

In 332 Israel and Judah (together called Judea from this point on) fell to Alexander the Great of Macedon, along with the rest of the Persian Empire. In 323, when Alexander died, Judea passed into the hands of the Ptolemies of Egypt, the Macedonian successors to Alexander in that part of his empire.<sup>33</sup> Under the Ptolemies the Jewish Council of Elders, under the leadership of the High Priest, administered the country. (It was around this time that *Ecclesiastes* was written.) In the century or so during which the country was ruled by the Ptolemies, the priesthood remained in the control of the line of Zadok, but under Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221) the High Priest withheld taxes for some reason (probably to aid Egypt's Seleucid enemies in Syria), and the Pharaoh retaliated by handing over the secular part of the government to one Tobias. The Tobiad family became wealthy as tax collectors, and influential at the Alexandrian court.

It was always part of the agenda of the Hellenistic kingdoms to make their subjects as Greek as possible, and the Tobiads were receptive to many aspects of the Greek way of life, unlike the family of Zadok, who saw in it a danger to be avoided, and considered the Tobiads collaborators seeking their own personal profit.

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<sup>33</sup>For the Jews under the Ptolemies, see Grant (1987) 201–204.

Alexandria, by this time, had the largest settlement of the Dispersion in its Jewish quarter, and life there was attractive, for the Pharaoh gave the Jews many privileges, including self-rule under their own Council of Elders, and a legal ranking the equal of the Macedonians', and higher than the native Egyptians'. The Tobiads were no doubt representative of the Dispersion, Jews who knew how to accommodate themselves to the native populations they lived among, gaining wealth from their commercial connections with other Jews in foreign lands, and, in Egypt, willing to work for their Greek masters as bureaucrats who could be trusted to have greater loyalty to the Ptolemaic government than to the local population. While retaining their Jewish identity, such people would almost unconsciously adapt to Gentile customs where it seemed their Law permitted it, and would come to look quite Hellenized to the Jews of the Homeland. The conflict between the Jews of the Dispersion and the more conservative Jews based in Palestine was already apparent, and it grew as time went on.

The conflict with the Gentiles was also becoming apparent. The Jews were resented by the Egyptians in Alexandria, as might be expected, and the first bout of anti-Semitic literature is to be found there in the history of Egypt by Manetho, High Priest at Heliopolis under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246). Manetho asserted that the Egyptians drove the Hebrews from their land to prevent the spread of the infectious diseases they carried (including leprosy), and attacked the Jews for cruelty toward and hatred of other peoples, and for sticking to themselves and not mixing with others. There were many other writers in Egypt and elsewhere who followed Manetho's example.

The Jewish population in the Dispersion increased dramatically as the troubled history of Judea unfolded, and refugees flowed into foreign communities. The increase in population exacerbated the conflict with the Gentiles. The resentment of the Egyptians overflowed into violence in the reign of the Emperor Gaius Caligula (37–41), when the Jews in Alexandria applied for full citizenship. Pagan gangs set up statues of the emperor within the synagogues, and Avillius Flaccus, the Roman governor, had thirty-eight members of the Jewish Council flogged publicly. Agrippa I, Tetrarch of Judea, grandson of Herod the Great, and a friend of Caligula, intervened with the Emperor, as the ruler of Judea often did on behalf of Jewish settlements abroad, and in 40 CE the Greek and Jewish communities in Alexandria each sent delegations to the emperor to plead their cases. The philosopher Philo Judaeus led the Jewish representatives. When the Jews pointed out that they would not sacrifice to him, but were accustomed to sacrifice to God on his behalf, Caligula was unimpressed, and when trouble broke out in Jamnia in Judea because the Greeks there had erected an altar to himself, which the Jews had destroyed, the Emperor ordered all Jewish places of worship to be converted to Pagan temples.

Luckily Agrippa persuaded him to withdraw the order, on the condition that Jews permit the Greeks to worship the emperor in Judea. When Caligula was murdered and Claudius (41–54) came to the purple, a policy of toleration was adopted, with the warning that the Jews must also show toleration. But the situation remained tense, and with the first Jewish revolt in the homeland, trouble arose as well in the Dispersion, with fighting in Alexandria, Caesaria and other cities. A second, ferocious rebellion in the Dispersion occurred under Trajan (98–117).<sup>34</sup> The refusal of the Jews to be assimilated, and their unwillingness to participate in the official civic religion of the Empire created continual friction between them and the “Greeks.”

But the prejudice among the subjugated Egyptians did not influence the prosperity of the Jews, which expressed itself at Alexandria in a flowering of scholarship.<sup>35</sup> First of all, the Bible was translated into Greek, producing what came to be called the *Septuagint*, the *Bible* of the Greek-speaking Jews of the dispersion. The translation was supposedly the work of seventy translators who, divinely inspired, all arrived independently at exactly the same Greek rendition of every passage. In actuality, the text seems to incorporate a number of preexisting translations by different authors, and was put together over a period of time, though most of it was done under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 BCE). The myth of the seventy functions to authenticate the *Septuagint*'s authority, so that one need not know Hebrew to verify the translation. The story comes down to us in the *Letter of Aristeas*, which purported to be a letter from a Pagan official to his brother, giving an account of the *Septuagint* and the Jewish religion. ‘Aristeas’ goes so far as to identify Yahweh with Zeus. It is an apology, then, but also a kind of testament to the Dispersion arguing that one could share in the Greek way of life without giving up Judaism. (It should be noted that the Hebrew version from which the *Septuagint* was translated has since been lost, and so the *Septuagint* varies in many readings from the modern Hebrew *Tanak*. It also included fifteen books, retained in the English *Bible* as the *Apocrypha*, which were not recognized in the Hebrew canon.)<sup>36</sup>

The literature of Hellenistic Judaism at Alexandria typically looks in two directions—to the Pagans, who are to be convinced that Jewish beliefs and practices are reasonable and philosophically justifiable, and to the Jews of the Homeland, who are to be convinced that one can preserve the essence of the Jewish faith while consorting with the Greeks and adopting some of their ideas. Among the philosophical Hellenizers we find

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<sup>34</sup>Grant (1987) 237–238, 246.

<sup>35</sup>For Alexandrian Jewish scholarship, see the summary in Grant (1987) 274–276.

<sup>36</sup>Grant (1987) 203.

Aristobolus (ca. 100 BCE) and Philo Judaeus (ca. 25 BCE – late 40's CE) arguing through an allegorical exposition of the *Torah* that Moses not only taught philosophy after the Greek manner, but taught much to the Greeks.<sup>37</sup>

*IV Maccabees*, an Apocryphal book found in the Septuagint, was written in Syria about this time. It attaches an account of the deaths of a number of Maccabean martyrs to a description of reason as the guide of life. In particular, wisdom controls the emotions through rational judgment, courage, justice and self-control, so that the wise man is able to do what he understands to be right, despite irrational emotional impulses to contrary actions.<sup>38</sup> So a fundamentally Stoic reading is given to the tale of the martyrs, tortured to death by a tyrant for refusing to eat defiling food. (The role of the tyrant testing the wise man with the threat of torture and death is borrowed especially from Roman Stoicism, of course, though it is perhaps to be noted that the situation is not made up, but actually occurred over and over again in the autocratic governments of the Mediterranean.)

Again, the *Wisdom of Solomon* (a part of the *Apocrypha*) seems to have been written by a first century Alexandrian. It adopts a Stoic-Platonic interpretation of the *Torah*, accepting, for instance, the preexistence and immortality of the soul,<sup>39</sup> and identifying the Wisdom of Yahweh with the Platonic Logos and the immanent Stoic world-soul.<sup>40</sup> The book is especially concerned with the problem of evil, and the suffering of the good, most especially the suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Gentiles. It suggests that God intended all his creatures to live forever, but the devil introduced sin into the world, and with sin entered death, non-being presumably being an appropriate punishment for turning away from Being.<sup>41</sup> It is obvious to anyone of good

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<sup>37</sup>Aristobolus is preserved only in quotations in Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and other writers. He soft-pedaled the anthropomorphism of the *Old Testament*, but his allegorical interpretation did not anticipate Philo's logos-doctrine, or make any real concessions to Greek philosophy. The chief point of the exercise seems to be to establish that the Greeks, from Homer through Aristotle, had borrowed their ideas from a translation of the Jewish scriptures. Philo, who is more strongly influenced by the Greeks, is discussed below.

<sup>38</sup>*IV Maccabees* 1:18 lists the virtues by which reason controls emotion, and 5:25 adds piety to the list. Through justice reason controls malice and kindred passions, through self-constraint it controls the desire for pleasure and the like, through courage fear. Wisdom, already familiar from *Proverbs*, is equated with reason, and assigned theoretical as well as practical functions. All this is developed and illustrated through stories from the scriptures. And then the tale of the martyrs is told. That is all, but though the book is brief, and rather light in philosophical content, it is clearly rooted in Stoic thought.

<sup>39</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 8:19-20: "As a child I was by nature well endowed, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body."

<sup>40</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 7–8.

<sup>41</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 3:23–24.

will that the world was made by God,<sup>42</sup> but when evil men began to worship creatures, noxious animals and plants were introduced to chastise them appropriately, clearly showing their error to those who could see.<sup>43</sup> The good suffer, because this world is a place of testing, and the good who pass the test go to a heavenly reward after their deaths, while the wicked are punished.<sup>44</sup> God patiently gives the wicked every opportunity, with gradually increasing punishments, to repent their injustice and idolatry,<sup>45</sup> and sometimes takes a good person young, knowing that he would be corrupted if he were to live longer.<sup>46</sup>

Other Hellenic-Judaic works include the tragedies on Jewish themes by Ezechielos (2d century BCE) and an epic poem on the Kings of the Jews by Philo the Elder (ca. 200 BCE). The Greek influence was not absent in other works less obviously Greek, both in Egypt and Palestine. There were Hellenistic short stories and romances (such as *Judith*), books of wisdom patterned after Greek philosophy (*Wisdom of Solomon*, *Pseudo-Phocylides*), and poetry and history done after Greek models (*II Maccabees* and the histories of Josephus).<sup>47</sup>

A new form of literature addressed to the Greek world is to be found in **Josephus's *Against Apion***, an apology for Judaism written in response to a hostile Egyptian historian. Josephus begins by defending the antiquity of the Jews, using in particular Plato's *Timaeus*, with its remarks on how the Greeks are children compared to the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean,<sup>48</sup> but then going on to refer to Jewish records with the claim that in their care to maintain the priestly line unadulterated with foreigners, the Temple had a complete record of those serving as high priest going back 2000 years.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Jewish writings are not a collection of contradicting histories, like those of the Greeks, but only 22 perfectly accurate sacred books in

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<sup>42</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1.

<sup>43</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 12:26–13:3.

<sup>44</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 4:5.

<sup>45</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 11-12. The faithful should take hope from the fact that the wicked are given every chance to repent, for this same mercy will be extended to them.

<sup>46</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 4:10-15 for the early death of the good, 11:22-24 for God's love of everything he has made and his consequent willingness to overlook sin that they might repent.

<sup>47</sup>Grant (1987) 274–276.

<sup>48</sup>*Against Apion* I 1.

<sup>49</sup>*Against Apion* I 7.

perfect harmony.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the Jews willingly die for their law and their books, seeing them to be divine, something no Greek would do for Homer.

But the apology is not purely defensive. Part of Josephus's program is to show the absurdity of Pagan beliefs. So he tells the story of the Jewish archer Mosollam, who, when he was with Alexander the Great, shot the bird the augurs were observing, and then argued that the bird knew nothing of the future, else he would have avoided being shot.<sup>51</sup> He is particularly harsh against the Egyptians, the Jews' accusers at Alexandria, who, he points out, take wild beasts to be gods.<sup>52</sup> He takes a good deal of space refuting the calumny of the Egyptian historian, Manetho, who said that the Jews were driven from Egypt because they were impure and diseased, in part to establish in the Roman mind the real cause for the Egyptian hatred of the Jews.<sup>53</sup>

As for the Greeks and Romans, their chief accusation is perhaps that the Jews will not worship the gods of the city, that is, of Alexandria. But the Jews are not permitted by their Scriptures to make images of, or worship foreign gods, and they do sacrifice for the Emperor in their own temple. Josephus also answers accusations that the Jews ate the flesh of foreigners in their rituals, and had laws requiring them to mistreat foreigners in various ways, and that they had produced no improvements in human life, no new sciences or crafts.<sup>54</sup> His work and that of other Jewish apologists provided the framework and many of the themes for Christian apologetic literature in the first two centuries CE.

Despite its sophistication and evident popularity in the *diaspora*, in the end, this Hellenized Jewish literature failed to root itself in Jewish culture. The future lay with the Rabbinic literature, which took little notice of the Greeks, and left little room for philosophical speculation. Indeed, the works of as great a scholar as Philo Judaeus had considerably more influence on Christian than on Jewish thought, and Jewish philosophy, when it did emerge in later centuries, was rooted in Islamic neo-Platonism rather than the Jews' own heritage from second-century Alexandria.

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<sup>50</sup>*Against Apion* I 8.

<sup>51</sup>*Against Apion* I 22.

<sup>52</sup>*Against Apion* I 25.

<sup>53</sup>*Against Apion* I 26.

<sup>54</sup>*Against Apion* II 6.

## 6. THE SECOND TEMPLE, PHARISEES, SADDUCEES AND ESSENES

Now at this time [Jonathan's high priesthood in the mid 140's B.C.E.] there were three schools of thought among the Jews, which held different opinions concerning human affairs; the first being that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes. As for the Pharisees, they say that certain events are the works of Fate, but not all; as to other events, it depends upon ourselves whether they shall take place or not. The sect of the Essenes, however, declare that Fate is the mistress of all things, and that nothing befalls men unless in accordance with her decree. But the Sadducees do away with Fate, holding that there is no such thing and that human actions are not achieved in accordance with her decree, but that all things lie within our own power...

Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XIII.5.9,  
§§ 171–173.<sup>55</sup>

In 200 BCE, the Seleucid Antiochus III the Great decisively defeated the forces of the Ptolemies, and gained control of Judea. Antiochus rewarded the Jews, who had aided him in his conquest, with autonomy and permission to follow their customs, and the Zadokite High Priest, Simon I the Just, who had taken Antiochus's side, came to enjoy considerable influence. Simon seems, in particular, to have encouraged the institution of Synagogues in Judea like those in the Dispersion, where Jews could gather to pray and study the *Torah*. But the honeymoon did not last. Antiochus suffered defeat at the hands of the Romans, and money was needed to pay the heavy tribute they imposed. Under his successor, Seleucus IV (187–175), taxes greatly increased, and the Temple seems to have been plundered by a Seleucid official. Moreover, the hostility between Hellenizers such as the Tobiads and the bulk of the Jews grew apace. Things came to a head when a Tobiad High Priest, Onias III, suspected of pro-Ptolemaic sympathies, was deposed and eventually assassinated, and his brother Jason put into his place by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163). Jason paid an increased tribute to Antiochus, and converted Jerusalem into a Greek city, complete with Gymnasium, a corps of uncircumcised Ephebes who exercised naked, and a change of the city's name to Antioch-in-Judea. Jason was overthrown by the orthodox and fled into exile in 172, but was replaced by Menelaus, who was more Hellenized yet. Again the tribute increased, and even some of the Temple plate went to Antiochus, until Jason staged a return and jailed his rival. Antiochus finally took a direct hand, seizing Jerusalem and reinstating Menelaus, looting the temple treasure and garrisoning the city. He then forbade the practice of circumcision and the celebration of the Sabbath,

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<sup>55</sup>As cited in Cohen (1987) 124.

ordering sacrifices to the Pagan Gods. Finally, he converted the Temple into a Temple of Zeus. Antiochus no doubt thought that his steps would be accepted, if grudgingly, but he miscalculated seriously. To the pious Jew, especially to the *hasidim*, a largely rural group of Jewish pietists, Zeus was not Yahweh, but Baal, and to ban circumcision was to destroy the covenant between the Jews and their God. The Jews rebelled, the bulk of their forces being drawn from the poorer classes, and under Judas Maccabaeus and his *hasidim*, the Hellenizing Jews were virtually exterminated, and the Seleucid army harassed from the country. In 164 Jerusalem fell, the Temple was reconsecrated (an event still celebrated in the feast of Hanukkah), and Judas concluded a treaty with the Romans. In 160 Judas fell in battle, and his brother Jonathan succeeded him, and took the office of High Priest as well, for which his family was not qualified. Jonathan, too, died in battle, but not before he had captured Joppa and obtained Seleucid recognition as governor of Judea. The last of the brothers, Simon, finally expelled the Seleucids altogether, and gained formal independence, assuming the hereditary office of High Priest and Ethnarch of Judea.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the Second Temple, despite its freedom from the control of unfaithful kings, and from the competition of other temples and high places, faced problems the First Temple never had. It was built by a Gentile King, not a Solomon, and its holiness remained unauthenticated by any miraculous event like the cloud of smoke and fire from the heavens that scripture spoke of in connection with the First Temple. It had been desecrated, and there was not even a prophet, much less a miracle, to verify its resacralization. The Maccabees became high priests, though they were not of the priestly line. And the trouble continued. In 63 BCE the Temple was once more profaned when the Romans entered its sacred grounds, and although it was rebuilt magnificently by Herod, he was only half a Jew, and appointed priests who, like the Maccabees, claimed no descent from Aaron.<sup>57</sup>

As a result, many Jews refused to accept the legitimacy of the Second Temple or its priesthood. There was already some protest under Persia, and this crystallized in the formation of full-blown anti-Temple sects after Antiochus Epiphanes's profanation, and the Maccabees' accession to Priesthood. These sects disappeared after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, dying with the issue that had brought them into existence. They were not all equally extreme. Some showed only a certain reserve concerning Temple worship, conducting their lives in such a way as to be able to do without it, if need be. Others viewed the Temple cult as corrupt

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<sup>56</sup>Grant (1987) 204–212.

<sup>57</sup>Cohen (1987) 132–133.

and illegitimate, and refused to participate in it. In addition to their attitude toward the Temple, the sects rejected what they viewed as impure practices among the rest of the Jews. They denounced marriages with foreign women, and within forbidden degrees of relation, adopted their own calendars of religious observances, and extended the laws of purity governing those within the temple to their daily lives. (If the Temple cannot be trusted, perhaps we had best do its work ourselves.) Thus they isolated themselves from an impure community, and preserved God's Law.<sup>58</sup>

The most important such sects in Judea seem to have been the three named by Josephus, the **Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes**. Though they were not, as Josephus presents them for his Gentile audience, philosophical schools, they apparently did have differences over matters of doctrine. In particular, the Sadducees denied "Fate" any role in human affairs, and rejected the immortality of the soul and resurrection after death. The denial of Fate seems to amount to an insistence on free will and its incompatibility with God's predetermination of our actions. The Essenes ascribed everything to Fate, or rather held that "all things are best ascribed to God,"<sup>59</sup> perhaps denying free will because of God's predetermination of our actions, like Christian Calvinists. They accepted the immortality of the soul and resurrection. The Pharisees, it seems, took a middle road on the issue of Fate, ascribing some events to Fate and others to free will, according to one place in Josephus, or, according to a better account, also found in Josephus:

when they determine that all things are done by fate they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit, since their notion is that it hath pleased God to make a temperament whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously.<sup>60</sup>

This suggests the Pharisees thought free will compatible with God's predetermination of our actions. The Pharisees accepted immortality of the soul and resurrection, but in some different manner from the Essenes.<sup>61</sup> It appears that the Jewish intellectuals of this period were, many of them, concerned to attribute all that happens to God, and perceived that this conception of God's transcendent power seemed to entail the

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<sup>58</sup>Cohen (1987) 129–130.

<sup>59</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII, 1, §§ 2–6, translated by William Whiston, *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (London: Routledge and Sons, n.d.). Excerpted in Baron and Blau (1954) 72–73.

<sup>60</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII, 1, §§ 2–6, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup>Aside from Josephus, cited at the head of this section, *Acts* 23:6 mentions the dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection of the dead.

acceptance of predetermination of human actions. Josephus probably has in mind a parallel to Stoic discussions of God's providence and fate, and means to portray the different schools as responding to the Stoic problem.

The Pharisees, for the most part well-to-do businessmen, seem to have been descendants of *hasidim* who had withdrawn their support from the Maccabean regime due to its increasingly secularism. They objected to Jonathan's assumption of the priesthood, and, perhaps in reaction to the way the revolt had turned out, moved toward a political pacifism, viewing worldly injustice and foreign domination as Yahweh's will. Their willingness to stay out of politics made it easy for them to make their way in the Dispersion, and they were well known for their interest in making converts.<sup>62</sup> They enjoyed influence with the people, due to their active participation in the Synagogues, and their concern for the poor and oppressed, and they often cut a figure in political affairs.<sup>63</sup> But though they lived among the people, viewing themselves as the servants of the community, they also observed a special purity, adhering to a number of laws handed down by their fathers in a tradition of legal scholarship, laws not in scripture and not generally observed by others.<sup>64</sup> They were associated with "scribes," scholars of this traditional Law, as it would appear, and specialists in its application.<sup>65</sup> They are regarded as the immediate predecessors of the Rabbinic tradition within Rabbinic texts. Their doctrines, and their adherence to the law passed down by their fathers might suggest this, but there is more. Where debates between Pharisees and Sadducees are recorded in the Rabbinic tradition, the Pharisees are invariably said to be in the right of it. Disputes are recorded between the school of Hillel and the school of Shaddai within the Pharisaic tradition, and Gamaliel, mentioned by St. Paul and Josephus, also cuts a figure in Rabbinic texts. But only fragments of the traditions of the Pharisees themselves seem preserved in Rabbinic texts, so one may speculate that the Pharisees, though their teachings strongly influenced the formation of the tradition, perhaps forming its core, were still only a part of the original group of Rabbis.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Grant (1987) 216–217. For the making of converts, see *Matthew* 23:15.

<sup>63</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XIII 15, § 5; the *New Testament* also testifies to the power of the Pharisees in Jewish society.

<sup>64</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XIII 10, § 6. The *New Testament*, of course, often mentions the strict observance of the Law by the Pharisees, in accord with a tradition of the elders (so *Matthew* 15, *Galatians* 1:14—Paul was a Pharisee). The Pharisees, when they question Jesus, always seem to question his observance of the Law, and Jesus attacks them for their tithes and purifications, their views on divorce, their observance of the Sabbath, their pursuit of purity in taking meals, and their pursuit of proselytes. (So *Matthew* 23:15–26.)

<sup>65</sup>Cohen (1987) 162.

<sup>66</sup>Cohen (1987) 158–159. Cohen suggests that the Pharisees were Priests, who therefore followed special laws of purity, but the evidence for that view seems slim.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, enjoyed little influence, though Josephus says people of the highest standing followed them, and the hereditary priests in control of the Temple were probably in their number.<sup>67</sup> In opposition to the Pharisees, the Sadducees insisted that only the laws in scripture need be observed. They were conservatives who refused to adopt innovations inspired by contact with the Persians or Greeks, and refused to engage in pietistic practices. Nonetheless, they had their problems with the Temple. Their name suggests they traced their group back to the “descendants of Zadok,” the High Priest. These original Zadokites saw themselves as preservers of an ancient tradition who refused to recognize the polluted Temple, the incorrect calendar by which Temple ceremonial was conducted, or the false priests who manned it.

It has generally been thought that the Essenes isolated themselves in the wilderness like a guild of prophets, withdrawn into their own narrow, pietistic communities, numbering no more than about four thousand souls, and exercising no general influence in the population. They abstained from sex, following the rules incumbent on those involved in a holy war, the war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. Refusing to participate in the impure Temple sacrifices, they made sacrifices of their own. They anticipated an apocalyptic conflict between their God and the forces of Evil, in which Israel would, after forty years of warfare, conquer all the nations of the world, and bring them to Yahweh’s judgment. Apocalyptic nationalism of the sort they espoused contributed to repeated Jewish revolts under the Roman Empire, but was eventually rejected by the Jewish tradition as nationalistic aspirations became less and less practical, and the views of the Pharisees, rejecting any apocalyptic expectation, prevailed.<sup>68</sup>

The isolation of the community may, however, be exaggerated. It is inferred in part from the report of Pliny (though Josephus remarks that the Essenes were to be found in all the towns of Judea), and in part from the assumption that the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran all belonged to the library of an isolated community. In fact, it now seems likely that Qumran was a military base, and that the scrolls deposited there were from Jerusalem, removed from the city for their safety during the war against the Romans in 66-74 CE. That would mean that the scrolls represent literature more widely accepted than previously thought, and given the prevalence in them of a complex of thought that can be identified with the Essenes, it is reasonable to view the Essenes living in the wilderness as part of a more broadly based movement, that seems to have spread quite

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<sup>67</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII 1, §§ 3–4. Grant (1987) 216.

<sup>68</sup>Grant (1987) 218–219. Grant identifies the community at Qumran with the Essenes.

widely in the Diaspora.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the most informative document here among the Dead Sea Scrolls is the Damascus Document, which describes the origin of an Essene community, probably in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. This work speaks of a two-fold Messiah, one a priest and one a king, and asserts that the Messiah will pardon the sins of the people (as Jesus claimed he would be able to pardon sins upon his return after his death). In particular, the document refers to a Teacher of Righteousness, and claims that

all those . . . who have listened to the voice of the Teacher of Righteous . . . shall rejoice . . .  
. . . God will forgive them, and they shall see his salvation.<sup>70</sup>

As for predestination,

from the beginning God chose them not. He knew their deeds before ever they were created.  
. . . He made known the Holy Spirit to them by the hands of his anointed ones . . . But those whom he hated he led astray.<sup>71</sup>

There are parallels in Paul. Some information about the Teacher of Righteousness can be picked up from scriptural interpretations in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for the Essenes and allied groups engaged in a form of allegorical interpretation of Scripture, finding hidden references to their doctrines in the oddest places, and greatly valued teachers good at that sort of thing. The Teacher of Righteousness was a master of this kind of interpretation, “to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets.”<sup>72</sup> It seems that the Teacher was seized and tried by a wicked priest, and that the more orthodox Jews did not support the teacher against the false accusations brought against him. Apparently the Teacher was arrested on the Sabbath of the Essenes, which they observed quite closely, and so no resistance could be offered. It is never asserted in any of the texts at our disposal that the Teacher was actually executed, but it may be assumed that he was, though it is asserted that God did not abandon him, and that God took vengeance on the evil priest.<sup>73</sup>

Pretty clearly this was a dress rehearsal for the career of Jesus, and at least one scholar takes Christianity to have grown out of a branch of the Essenes whose leaders, in particular Paul, experienced visions

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<sup>69</sup>Ellegård (1999) Ch. 4, for this paragraph and the next.

<sup>70</sup>Vermes (1987) 99.

<sup>71</sup>Vermes (1987) 84.

<sup>72</sup>Vermes (1987) 287.

<sup>73</sup>Ellegård (1999) 111-112 collects the texts from Vermes. They are found in Vermes (1987) 283, 285, 287, 288, 289 (all of these from a commentary on *Habakkuk*), 278 (commentary on *Micah*) and 292 (on *Psalms* 37).

of the risen Teacher. They thought that the teacher's resurrection and death to free us from our sins assured us of salvation if we believed, but this only worked if the Teacher was in fact a human being. In the second century, the story goes, in response to Docetists who claimed that the Teacher never was a real human being at all, but is rather a spirit of some kind sent by God, an attempt was made to reconstruct the human life of the teacher, and so the story of Jesus in the Gospels was constructed.<sup>74</sup> The testimony to Jesus's life seems strong enough to reject this notion, but it must be admitted that the Essene influence on the early Christian movement was very strong, and it may be that some Essene communities in fact identified Jesus with their Teacher.

The rejection of the Essenes by the Jews was, in particular, a rejection of the notion that the struggle was one with an internal adversary, pitting Jew against Jew, namely with Satan and his army of darkness.<sup>75</sup> The Jewish *Bible* seems quite deliberately to exclude Jewish writings reflecting this notion, which survive as part of the *Apocrypha* ("the hidden") and the *Pseudepigrapha* ("false writings"). Jewish writings occasionally talk about Satan from as early as 600 BCE, but this early Satan is not the leader of the army hostile to God and his people of the Christians, but rather a servant of God who, often under God's express orders, places obstacles in the way of human beings. So that angel was a *satan* who obstructed the road of the prophet Balaam when he would go where the Lord had forbidden him, and he would have killed Balaam had he proceeded, and not been saved by the balkiness of his ass, who, unlike his master, could see the angel blocking the path.<sup>76</sup> Again, Satan figures in the *Book of Job*, where he is a member in good standing of God's court, but opposed to human beings—a domestic enemy of humankind, not a foreign prince with his host of demons. Satan also incites David to displease God by conducting a census,<sup>77</sup> and, with the return from the exile, foments division between those returning and the inhabitants of the land.<sup>78</sup> So Satan, it came to be thought, might have his own party among the Jews, and strive to turn Jew against Jew, demonstrating to the Lord as best he could that human beings were faithless. The notion grew up in succeeding years that Satan was, not a member of God's court, but an opponent of God, with his own court and army, no doubt by assimilation to the Ahriman of the Zoroastrians. It is this Satan, which was never adopted into mainstream Judaism, that is feared by the Essenes.

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<sup>74</sup>Ellegård (1999).

<sup>75</sup>For the remainder of this section I depend on Pagel (1995) Chapter 2, Russell (1977) Chapter 5.

<sup>76</sup>*Numbers* 22.

<sup>77</sup>*1 Chronicles* 21:1.

<sup>78</sup>*Zechariah* 3:2.

As for how this new Satan could have arisen, many different stories were told. The natural account, of course, would suggest that Satan had been expelled from the heavenly court, perhaps because of his opposition to human beings, or some prideful resistance to Yahweh, and that he brought about the fall of some portion of Israel by tempting them to follow him rather than Yahweh. This account is plainly stated in *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, and was read into a passage in *Isaiah*, probably referring to a king of Babylon or Assyria, where “Lucifer,” “the bright morning star,” is cast into the underworld when he endeavors to make himself like the most high.<sup>79</sup> Or perhaps Satan refused to recognize humanity’s status in God’s eyes, was cast out of heaven for that reason, and continues to harbor a confirmed hatred for all things human.<sup>80</sup> As the accuser and tempter of man, whether this be with God’s approval or without it, the devil is often conceived as the source of all sin, the teacher of unrighteousness who corrupted the earth,<sup>81</sup> and even brought death into the world.<sup>82</sup> One can see in these stories a certain drive to make Yahweh, originally the source of evils as well as good for men, perfectly benevolent, so that what were originally his acts are assigned to his agents, and his agents are assigned more and more independence of action, more and more at odds with Yahweh’s intentions, until they become entirely inimical to him, and entirely responsible for their own evil actions. If Yahweh is seen as the source of all, of course, this raises the question how the devil could have formed an evil intention, a problem to be explored in later Jewish and Christian theodicy.

A third account, influential in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, suggests that some angels lusted after human women, and so were drawn down to earth. The story is rooted in a remark in *Genesis* 6, that “When men began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair,” mated with them, and produced offspring who were “giants in the earth,” and “mighty men of renown.” This story had special appeal, no doubt, because it parodies the Pagan notion of a Hero, and provides an explanation of Pagan religions. (In its earliest form the “Sons of God” were no doubt lower members of the pantheon, so that the story *paralleled* Pagan religion.) It would seem, according to *Jubilees*, that members of God’s court mated with human women (note the typical Jewish concern with impure marriage to forbidden outsiders), who gave birth to such beings as Hercules, and, expelled from God’s presence for their behavior,

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<sup>79</sup>*Isaiah* 14:12-15. *Second Enoch* (Slavonic Enoch, Book of the Secrets of Enoch) 20:4–5.

<sup>80</sup>This is the account in *The Books of Adam and Eve*.

<sup>81</sup>*Ethiopic Enoch* 9:6, 10:8.

<sup>82</sup>*Wisdom of Solomon* 2:24.

these immortals set themselves up as gods over the nations. God destroyed them and their human allies in the flood, but they persist as evil spirits or demons to mislead the souls of men until God shall destroy them in the last days.<sup>83</sup>

The story is preserved most elaborately in the *First Book of Enoch*, which tells us that God appointed angels to watch over the earth, and Semihazah, their leader, convinced 200 of his companions to violate God's commands by mating with human women, thus producing the mighty men of *Genesis* 6, who "consumed the produce of all the people until the people hated feeding them," and became unjust and tyrannical rulers of the people.<sup>84</sup> When these giants were destroyed by God's angels, their evil spirits remained, since they inherited something of the immortality of the Watchers, and these evil spirits plague the Earth to this day.<sup>85</sup> A second version of the story suggests that Azazel taught people metallurgy and other crafts, the secret knowledge of God and his angels, which led to the making of weapons and warfare, jewelry and feminine vanity.<sup>86</sup> In some very old Mesopotamian myths the craftsman God, hoping to aid the human beings which he originally produced, reveals forbidden knowledge of the arts to men, necessitating measures (the introduction of death, for instance) to limit their power so they cannot threaten heaven. We have a development of already ancient mythological themes here. Azazel suffers a fate reminiscent of that of Prometheus, being buried alive (for he is immortal) in the desert for teaching men these crafts.<sup>87</sup> The watchers, in earlier versions of the myth, were no doubt overseers who became too fond of the human servants of the Gods, and perhaps assisted them in some trouble or took their side in some dispute, in opposition to the king of the gods.

*The Book of Watchers* and associated works blended into the *First Book of Enoch* suggest that obedience to God is what marks one as a member of the chosen, and that God will destroy the apostate Jews in the last

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<sup>83</sup>The story of the Watchers is much elaborated in *Enoch*, and found in *Jubilees* 5-7, and their persistence of evil spirits after the bodily destruction of the Watchers is detailed in *Jubilees* 10. *Jubilees* 15: 31 suggests that God himself set up ruling spirits over each nation in order to lead them astray. In this work, the evil spirit Mastema is responsible for the command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham is concerned lest evil spirits, "who have dominion over the thoughts of human hearts," should lead him astray. The Essene *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* makes Mastema the Prince of Darkness, who rules in the underworld. This work, as well as *Jubilees*, speaks of a Belial or Beliar, whose particular function is to set Jew against Jew, seducing Jews from their commitment to the Lord.

<sup>84</sup>*Enoch* 6-7.

<sup>85</sup>*Enoch* 15-16.

<sup>86</sup>*Enoch* 8.

<sup>87</sup>*Enoch* 10.

days. Thus it prepares the way for Christians to identify the saved with those who have deliberately chosen God and rejected Satan, setting aside one's status as a member of the chosen people as irrelevant. Jesus fully accepted the picture of the war between Satan and the Lord we find in the Jewish sectarians, and the implied account of Pagan religion, and so the demonization of domestic enemies by these sectarians was to establish itself in a larger world, and form the foundation for that intolerance which so contributed to the success of the Christian movement.

### 7. THE RABBINIC TRADITION

Moses received *Torah* from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets handed it on to the men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: be deliberate in judgment, raise many disciples, and make a hedge about the *Torah*.

The opening of the *Pirke Abot*<sup>88</sup>

Simon Maccabee was assassinated in 135 BCE, and Antiochus VII Sidetes obtained control of Judea, but John Hyrcanus I (134–104) regained independence for his people by once more treating with Rome, and then annexed Galilee, Samaria and Idumaea, converting the people to Judaism by force. (The Pharisees refused to recognize these conversions, which was part of the reason for their later suspicion of Galilean prophets, and Herod the Great's Idumaeen origins put off many Jews). Alexander Jannaeus (103–76), John Hyrcanus's brother, succeeded him. He was a Hellenizer, and, like his brother, a conqueror, who concentrated on expanding his kingdom. He claimed the title of King, and finally drove a party of the Pharisees into open rebellion, which was put down savagely. Alexander's widow, Salome Alexandra (76–67) succeeded him, and she backed off from his confrontational policy, even favoring the Pharisees. After her, the Hasmonean kingdom declined, but it was not destined to fall apart of itself. Before that could happen, Rome abolished the Seleucid kingdom and annexed Syria, intending it as a buffer against the Parthians in Mesopotamia.<sup>89</sup> One party of the quarreling Hasmoneans called in Pompey, who, when he began to sense that his client king was going to be less than cooperative, seized Jerusalem with considerable slaughter, and desecrated the Temple, albeit unintentionally, by entering the Holy of Holies. John Hyrcanus II, after a checkered career, finally became

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<sup>88</sup>Translation from Goldin (1957) 43.

<sup>89</sup>Grant (1987) 219–222.

Ethnarch of Judea, under the thumb of the Romans, when he was able to lend military assistance to Caesar during his sojourn with Cleopatra in Egypt. In the complex politics and civil wars that followed, Herod, a son of Antipater, John Hyrcanus's Idumaeen associate, finally became Ethnarch of the region as the Roman candidate opposed to Antigonus, who was favored by the Parthians. In 37 he took Jerusalem after a brutal siege, and reorganized the government, executing over half of the Sanhedrin (but sparing the Pharisees Hillel and Shammai). The Sadducees suffered from these proscriptions far worse than the Pharisees, since they had tended to throw their support to the Hasmoneans, while the Pharisees avoided politics when they could. Herod managed to survive Augustus Caesar's victory in the East, successfully shifting his loyalty away from Antony, and then, in spite of the ruthlessness he had shown in securing power, he proved a good monarch, engaging in much building, including the splendid new port at Caesaria, and a magnificently rebuilt Temple, turning Jerusalem into a prosperous place of pilgrimage for the now extensive Jewish population in the Dispersion. He taxed his territories heavily, but handled the money well, and acted quickly and generously in famines and other emergencies. His effective government was recognized by Rome, which periodically transferred new territories to his control, but his reputation among the Jews was darkened by his early years of ruthlessness, as well as his strong Hellenizing tendencies. (His organizational and monetary assistance to the Olympic games in 12 BCE as President of the Games did much to give the event a new vigor and popularity.) His efforts to please Rome got him in trouble with the Jews at last, when he asked his subjects to swear an oath of loyalty to himself and the Emperor, and the Pharisees refused to do it. For this they received only fines, but the Pharisees began talking of a Messiah soon to come, and the dying King finally condemned a number of them to death, along with his own son, Antipater, who supported them. Despite his ruthless and bloody behavior at the beginning and end of his life, Herod provided a good thirty years of peace and prosperity to Judea, and during that time the schools of Hillel and Shammai flourished, providing the foundation for the Rabbinic tradition.

Upon Herod's death in 4 BCE Augustus divided the country among his three sons. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Peraea until 39 CE, Philip got southern Syria, and died in 34 CE, and Archelaus gained Judea proper. But the Romans deposed Archelaus after ten years in response to complaints from his subjects, and Judea became a Roman province. The Romans immediately made themselves unpopular with a new census (suggesting higher taxes as well as a violation of the proscriptions of the *Torah*), and various resistance groups quickly formed, drawing on messianic expectations. The Pharisees, at least in their more radical wing, were sympathetic to the anti-Roman resistance, and the Sadducees controlled the High Priesthood. At the time of

Jesus's death Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea, Caiaphas the High Priest, and Herod Antipas still reigned in Galilee. The conflict between Jews and Romans seemed to escalate with every new governor, and finally culminated in full scale revolt in 66 CE. The Romans were distracted by their own affairs, namely civil war upon the death of Nero, but when Vespasian emerged the victor, the fate of the revolt was sealed. In 70 CE Jerusalem was taken, and the Temple destroyed. The Romans went on to abolish the High Priesthood, and the Council of Elders.

**The Rabbinic tradition**, which defined later Jewish thought, was established between the second and sixth centuries CE. The Rabbis became dominant only with the destruction of the Temple in the rebellion of 66–70 CE, and the even more disastrous Bar Kochba rebellion of 132–135, after which the Romans rebuilt Jerusalem as a pagan city, and renamed Judea “Palestine,” the “land of the Philistines.” The Pharisees emerged from the first rebellion as the leaders of the people. They had opposed the rebellion, insisting that the Roman rule was imposed by God, so that the Jews must acquiesce in it. Not only did their policy seem to many Jews to have been justified by events, but the Romans were glad to have them as collaborators. Vespasian shut down the Temple, diverting the temple tax to the Roman treasury in punishment, and abolished the office of High Priest and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council which had up to that time represented the Jewish nation to the Roman. During the rebellion, in 68, when the Temple was besieged, the Pharisaic Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai fled Jerusalem, and, taking refuge with the Romans, obtained permission from Vespasian to establish a refugee settlement at Jamnia (Yavneh) on the coast, and an academy for Jewish teachers, which became the leading school of the Palestinian Rabbis.<sup>90</sup> The scholars of Jamnia came to be recognized as the leaders of Judea by the Romans, and the Patriarch of the school stepped into the place of the High Priest, levying taxes, appointing judges, eventually even claiming descent from King David. (The office gained in power continually, and eventually came into conflict with the Rabbis, as might have been expected, until 425, when it was, for unknown reasons, abolished.) The most famous of these Patriarchs, Judah ha-Nasi I (135–219) is traditionally regarded as the chief editor of the *Mishnah*, the culminating legal work of the *tannaim* (“teachers”), the earlier Rabbis. (The *Pirke Aboth*, “*Chapters of the Fathers*,” the best known portion of the *Mishnah*, deals purely with ethical matters, unlike the rest of the book, which deals for the most part with the Law, and opens with an account of the chain of tradition from Yahweh to Moses, and from Moses to the Rabbinic scholars.) The Rabbis

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<sup>90</sup>The academy at Jamnia moved to Galilee after the Bar Kochba War, Galilee being the central habitation of the Jews under the new arrangement. For the history of this period, see Grant (1984) 245–247, for political events, and Cohen (1987), Chapter 7, for the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism.

of the third to fifth centuries, whose chief works were the two *Talmudim*, collections of commentary, *midrash*, on the *Mishnah*, together with a good many extra-scriptural, legendary tales, *haggadah*, are called the *amoraim* (“speakers”). In Babylonia, which was controlled by the Parthians, and then the Sassanian Persians, Judaism flourished, establishing schools at Sura and Pumbeditha which survived the conquest by Caliph Omar, and closed down only in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was in these schools that the *Babylonian Talmud* emerged.

The Rabbinic tradition eschewed the Hellenistic philosophy of writers such as Philo, as well as apocalyptic literature that might bring about further fruitless rebellion. The survival of their religion required both policies. But though the Rabbis rejected Greek philosophy, that does not mean they were uninfluenced by Hellenism. Rabbinic argumentation and scholarly analysis are rooted in the practices of Hellenistic rhetoric, Rabbinic ethics is close to Stoicism, and *midrash*, or commentary on scripture, is a form of literature unknown in Israel before the arrival of the Greeks. Even the chain of tradition, reaching back from teacher to teacher, was a Hellenistic idea, reflecting the chains of tradition in the Greek philosophic schools. Moreover, the Rabbis were disinclined to reject the possibility of a righteous Gentile sharing in the afterlife with God. The “Noahide Laws” were elaborated on, and it was held that a Gentile who adhered to these minimal Laws, Laws imposed on all humanity by Yahweh, not merely on the Jews, would be saved. (One of these laws was generally thought to prohibit idolatry, so a Gentile could not worship images and attain salvation.)<sup>91</sup>

The center of Jewish thought was the *Bible*, and especially the *Torah*. These books cried out for interpretation, for *midrash*, and the interpretations given were often quite adventurous. Hellenizers such as Philo Judaeus found a difficulty in the *Torah* due to its manifest lack of philosophical content, and argued that the book was really an allegory for a Platonic ascent of the soul. This would not rule out its literal truth to his mind, and Jewish commentary never denied the literal truth of scripture, however fanciful the non-literal interpretations they laid on it might be. Multiple interpretations were perfectly possible, and all could jointly be true. (By contrast, some second century Christians claimed that the ritual laws of the Jews were *never* meant to be taken literally, but had only a figurative sense, and the Alexandrian School, including Philo, Clement and Origen, held that many passages in scripture were discoverably false in their literal sense, and this provided the

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<sup>91</sup>Cohen (1987) 216–217. The laws prohibited idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, and the eating of flesh taken from an animal while still alive, and prescribed the establishment of courts of law. Maimonides argued that those who followed these laws because they were reasonable were not to be regarded as righteous, or perhaps even wise. Only those who followed them in obedience to God were righteous.

clue that a “spiritual” or metaphorical interpretation was intended.)<sup>92</sup> In another mode of interpretation, especially characteristic of the Palestinian Rabbis, the Exodus from Egypt might be viewed as a “Type” of salvation by the Lord, so that its lessons could be applied to any act of salvation that might occur. (Again, this carried over into Christian interpretation of Scripture, which found “types” of Christ and his saving acts in the *Old Testament*.) Thus new meanings were constantly found in the old events recounted in the *Bible*, and, in particular, prophecies continued to be relevant and verifiable in current events of which they were types.

The general view among the Rabbis was that these interpretations had been anticipated and intended by God all along. So the Palestinian Talmud tells us that “any novelty which a student might advance while studying with his master was already dictated (by God) to Moses at Mount Sinai.”<sup>93</sup> On the other hand a lesser Prophet such as Habakkuk might be told by God to “write down things that are going to come upon the last generation, but the fulfillment of the end time He did not make known to him.”<sup>94</sup> On either view, though, God understood all the implications of what he had revealed, even for later times. The only issue was whether the receptacle of the revelation understood it.

## 8. THE LIFE OF PHILO JUDAEUS

And God, not being urged on by any prompter (for who else could there have been to prompt him?) but guided by his own sole will, decided that it was fitting to benefit with unlimited and abundant favors a nature which, without the divine gift, was unable of itself to partake of any good thing; but he benefits it, not according to the greatness of his own graces, for they are illimitable and eternal, but according to the power of that which is benefitted to receive his graces. For the capacity of that which is created to receive benefits does not correspond to the natural power of God to confer them; since his powers are infinitely greater, and the thing created being not sufficiently powerful to receive all their greatness would have sunk under it, if he had not measured his bounty, allotting to each, in due proportion, that which was poured upon it. And if any one were to desire to use more undisguised terms, he would not call the world, which is perceptible only to the intellect, any thing else but the reason of God, already occupied in the creation of the world; for neither is a city, while only perceptible to the

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<sup>92</sup>Diodorus of Sicily (Siculus) 1.94.1–2. Cohen (1987) 207.

<sup>93</sup>*Peah* 2:6, 17a. Cited in Cohen (1987) 203.

<sup>94</sup>A Qumran text interpreting *Habakkuk* 2:1–2, cited in Cohen (1987) 203.

intellect, anything else but the reason of the architect, who is already designing to build one perceptible to the external senses, on the model of that which is so only to the intellect—this is the doctrine of Moses, not mine. Accordingly he, when recording the creation of man, in words which follow, asserts expressly, that he was made in the image of God—and if the image be a part of the image, then manifestly so is the entire form, namely, the whole of this world perceptible by the external senses, which is a greater imitation of the divine image than the human form is. It is manifest also, that the archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the Reason of God.

Philo, *On the Creation of the World*, VI 24-25<sup>95</sup>

The most important of the Hellenizing thinkers among the Jews was **Philo Judaeus**. An older contemporary of St. Paul, Philo was born about 25 BCE in Alexandria and died before 50 CE. His family were fabulously wealthy, fully Hellenized Jews, so Philo received the best liberal education from Greek tutors.<sup>96</sup> He was nonetheless quite meticulous about keeping the Law, which he insisted should be followed by Gentile proselytes as well as those born Jewish, and his world view remains fundamentally Jewish, not Platonic. It is almost certain that he could read no Hebrew, but accepted the *Septuagint* as divinely inspired.<sup>97</sup> His work is a synthesis of Greek philosophy and revealed scripture, accomplished through allegorical interpretation, mostly focused on *Genesis*. The allegory is rooted in tradition, as he often attests, but not the Rabbinic tradition, rather a Hellenizing tradition of commentary on the *Septuagint*.<sup>98</sup> In form his writings are for the most part *midrash*, commentary on scripture. His religious inspiration, however, derives as much from Platonic mysticism, with its emphasis on the experience of God, as from Judaism. In particular, he adopts the Pagan/Platonic notion that

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<sup>95</sup>Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources* (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), Vol. III: *The Roman World*, pp. 355-369.

<sup>96</sup>He credits Moses with Greek tutors, *Life of Moses* I 23. John Dillon (1977) established that Philo is best regarded as Middle Platonist, rather than Stoic, eclectic, or whatever. For Philo see also Runia (1986) on his doctrine of creation, and David Winston, "Philo of Alexandria," Ch. 13 in Gerson (2010).

<sup>97</sup>Philo, *Life of Moses* II 40.

<sup>98</sup>In *On the Creation of the World* x, Moses was said to have called the heaven *ouranos* (the Greek term) from *oros* = limit, that is, the limit of all things, or *oratos* = visible, as though Moses spoke Greek! There is no recognition of an original Hebrew scripture. Philo did often provide etymologies of Hebrew names, but these, it seems, are drawn from Greek reference works devoted to the subject.

one is saved when the soul is released from the body to return to God.

The interest in Philo's thought arises from two sources. The first is a historical accident, for Philo is the only Middle Platonist of his time from whom we have extensive writings, and so he stands in for an entire philosophical movement. In particular, he makes the Forms the thoughts of God, an important revision of the Platonic vision which must have been general in Middle Platonism around this time, though we can view it at first hand only in Philo.<sup>99</sup> The second is his adaptation of Plato to the Jewish outlook, which may be regarded as a pre-adaptation to the Christian outlook, and contributes to the popularity of Platonism among Christian thinkers later. In particular, the tradition of scriptural interpretation he represents bore enormous consequences for Christian thought. All of Philo's originality is related to his merging of Plato and the Jewish Scripture. The reconciliation of the two, insofar as it was possible while maintaining the authority of Scripture, forms the essential background of all his philosophical endeavors.

Philo's family was old wealth, and he and his brother, and his father before him, seem to have held Roman citizenship. His father one of the richest men in the Roman world. Philo's leadership of the embassy to Gaius Caligula indicates he was himself the political leader of the Alexandrian Jews. He was no recluse, and enjoyed his wealth and all the public entertainments of the day. Indeed, his frequent references to the matter suggest he was especially interested in wrestling. Still, he seems to have been studious, and uninterested in running the family businesses. He left that to his younger brother, Alexander. Alexander lent Herod Agrippa, at a low point in his career, two hundred thousand drachmas, and he provided the gold and silver plating of the nine gates at the temple in Jerusalem. As befitted his wealth, he was responsible for the collection of taxes, and he was a friend of Claudius. This served him well when he was imprisoned during the riots at Alexandria under Caligula, for Claudius, after becoming Emperor, released him. One of Alexander's sons married Herod's daughter, Berenice, and another rose high in the Roman administration, becoming procurator of Palestine about 46 CE, and prefect of Egypt under Nero, and was instrumental in bringing Vespasian to the throne.

Of Philo's writings,<sup>100</sup> *The Hypothetica*, an apology for Judaism akin to Josephus's *Against Apion*, survives in fragments only. *On the Contemplative Life*, concerning the Therapeutae, is from this work, as is an account of

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<sup>99</sup>No Pagan writer drew on Philo later, so any parallel with Philo's thought will presumably indicate something common to Philo and the other, unknown, Platonists of his time. Philo had no intention of being original—he wanted to square Scripture with the received views in Philosophy, not with innovative views of his own.

<sup>100</sup>For the list of writings and their organization, see Goodenough (1962) ch. 2. For a translation of Philo's works, see Philo (1929–62).

the Essenes, and a reply to a hostile critic of the Jews, to be found in Eusebius.<sup>101</sup>

*The Exposition of the Law*, to which *The Life of Moses* is the introduction, is an exposition of the *Torah* for friendly gentiles in 12 books. Moses is represented here as an ideal king and sage, the Law ensouled, become vocal and applicable to real human difficulties, the one who converts the divine law into statutes for human observance. There follows *On the Creation of the World*, which reads an enormous amount of Greek philosophical and cosmological lore into the first three chapters of *Genesis*. This work closes with a creed of sorts, asserting that God exists from eternity and is ruler of the world, that he is One and has brought the material world into being in time, and that but one world, which exhausts all the matter that he has created, and that he exercises a providence in the world like that of a father for his children, not deterministic, but consistent with free will, for he has given human beings free will, insofar as he has given us a share of his *Logos*. Free will is a power of rational choice. *On Abraham*, *On Isaac*, and *On Jacob* follow, which treat the Patriarchs as an embodiment of the Law in general, that is, an ideal of proper behavior. *On Joseph* is next, and treats of the ideal ruler. Then *On the Decalogue* deals with the written law of God, and is followed by *On the Special Laws*, which derives the special laws from the general laws of the Decalogue, which are, in their turn, defended as the basic principles of law and perfectly in accord with reason. The books on the special laws, it has been pointed out, seem to present an actually working code of law with many Roman procedures, as well as much that is present in Palestinian Jewish law (Halaka), and Goodenough has proposed that they reflect the actual practices of Jewish courts in Egypt. There follows a treatise *On Virtues*, which treats of bravery, love of mankind, repentance, and nobility, and may have originally included a section on piety. The point of this book is to square Jewish Law with Greek ethics, and the discussion of love of mankind (*philanthropia*) seems calculated to answer charges that Jews love no one but their own people. The last treatise is *On Rewards and Punishments*, which chiefly treats of mystic attainments, as opposed to sorrow and alienation from God and the Law of the world, rather than an afterlife.

Another series of treatises known as *The Allegorical Commentary*, in 21 books, is addressed to Jews interested in a mystical interpretation of their religion. These books, many of which are lost or incomplete, work their way through scripture, mostly verse by verse, developing a detailed allegorical commentary, beginning with the second chapter of *Genesis*. They presuppose a reader who already knows the outlines of the doctrines behind the commentary, and indulge in frequent digressions, particularly when it is announced that a verse is absurd taken literally, so that an allegorical interpretation will have to be developed. A similar work

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<sup>101</sup>Eusebius, *Preparation of the Gospels* VIII 1.18; VIII 5–7.

is *Questions and Answers*, some larger fragments of which are preserved in Armenian.<sup>102</sup> The question is always “what does this verse mean?” The answers discuss both the literal and the mystical meaning, and generally run to about a page in length. Apparently, from the fragments we have, every verse of the *Torah* was examined here. A number of interpretations is given for each passage, and little attempt is made to assess which are better, so it looks like a collection of notes.

Individual treatises not included in these great omnibus works include a brief sermon, *On Blessings and Curses*, a work *On the Eternity of the World*, which argues that the world must have been created and cannot perish (this is the beginning of a more extended treatise the rest of which is lost), and *Every Good Man is Free*, companion to another treatise, now lost, *Every Wicked Man is a Slave*, which is opposed to Stoic determinism. In contrast is *On Providence*, which defends the positive side of Stoicism. Finally, there is a dialogue *Alexander, or On the Question Whether Dumb Animals Have the Power of Reason*.

## 9. PHILO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

In view of Philo's position as a Jew, we should perhaps deal first with his political thought, and his treatment of the relations between Jews and the Roman Empire.<sup>103</sup> Philo advised getting along with the Romans, since it was stupid to get oneself beaten up or killed by uselessly protesting their power. He was careful to show no disrespect for Pagan practices in his writings. There are three sources for his views on the Romans: (1) *The Embassy to Gaius* and *Against Flaccus*, (2) the treatise *On Joseph*, addressed to friendly Gentiles, (3) various places in the writings addressed strictly to Jews. Each has to be treated with its audience in mind.

*The Embassy* and *Against Flaccus* are occasional pieces addressed to the public at large. *Against Flaccus* tells the story of an official who prospered in life until he undertook to persecute the Jews, and so brought the wrath of God down upon him. In fact, it was his opposition to the Emperor Gaius's (Caligula's) succession that destroyed Flaccus, but Philo insists that he opposed Gaius because Gaius wished to intercede on behalf of the Jews and attributes Gaius's success to the Jewish God. Flaccus had tried to force the Jews to violate the Sabbath and that is what brought him down. The point, it seems, was to present the treatise as a warning to the new prefect, who had every reason to believe that the new emperor, Claudius, in fact favored the Jews, and might

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<sup>102</sup>This is translated in the supplementary volumes of the Loeb series.

<sup>103</sup>For Philo's political views, Goodenough (1962) ch. 3; Goodenough (1938).

intervene on their behalf. The *Embassy* is similarly addressed to Claudius, the new Emperor, with the aim of demonstrating that Gaius had violated the principles of true kingship, in part by persecuting the Jews and forcing them to worship the Emperor, and been overthrown as a result. Philo has little respect for truth or consistency when he is addressing Gentiles.

In the *Allegory*, addressed to the Jews alone, Philo treats the Roman question through his discussion of Joseph, generally supposed to be the ideal ruler. The man is represented as a villain, in rebellion against the virtues and godliness of his father and his eleven brothers. Like the Romans, Joseph is full of empty opinions, arrogant, and a useless drain on those who are productive in society. In his interpretation of Joseph's dreams when he lived with his brothers, Philo says the other sheaves bowed to Joseph's in caution, not out of respect, but when the dreamer becomes the sun, taking the place of divinity, he must be resisted to the death. Joseph is treated rather differently in the works intended for a Gentile audience. He is now indeed an ideal ruler, and his brothers selfish characters who must be brought under control. As the ideal ruler he governs firmly, but with a concern for the interests of his subjects and the preservation of their legal traditions, an honest man free of graft, who supports those who aim for justice and peace. In brief, Philo endeavors to lead the Roman rulers to good treatment of the Jews by praising them when they rule well. But he does not really recognize their right to rule, or give any argument for their legitimacy, though he no doubt believed that they, like Joseph, had been raised to their position by the power of God, so that their power had to be respected.

Philo sees the state in its ideal form as a reflection of the Law of God. In a home, the father is the law, that is, whatever injunctions are enforced there, if he is not hypocritical, will flow from his character, and give expression to it, reflecting the ideals at which he himself aims. It is the same with God, except, of course, that God in no way falls short of his own ideals. But there is no need of law between creatures, if they are all perfect, for God has so ordained things that they are all, as it were, equal, and no laws beyond natural ones are needed, even for human beings, who are not merely a part of nature, but citizens of a universal polity in virtue of their immaterial souls.<sup>104</sup> But, like the Cynics, Philo thinks that human rulers do serve a certain purpose,

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<sup>104</sup>*On Abraham* i asserts that the law is natural and the virtuous simply follow their natural impulses. *Abraham* x derives Abraham's virtue from instruction, Isaac's from nature, and Jacob's from practical experience. Interestingly, *Abraham* xx makes virtue masculine and reason feminine, suggesting that the will is primary in virtue. The story of Abraham's being approached by the three angels, whom he addresses as one, which is taken as proof of the Trinity by Christians, Philo reads as a matter of God appearing in three ways, depending on how people approach him. Some approach him for his own sake, some for his beneficence, and some as the ruler with authority to punish. (*Abraham* xxiv–xxv) In *On Fugitives*, Philo gives an allegorical interpretation of the cities of refuge (*Numbers* 35:9–28). The nearest is the negative side of the law, the next its positive, beneficent side, the next divine forgiveness and mercy, and the one across the river God's cosmic law.

given the imperfections of men. Human beings are greedy and faithless toward one another, they do not follow the universal natural law of right reason, and so it is necessary to make an addition to the constitution of nature. The laws of men are made for the sake of exploiting others, and regulating the greedy and faithless so they do not harm one another. In particular, the *politicus*, the political administrator, is a superfluous addition to the natural economy, living off it like a parasite.<sup>105</sup> Nature, though, achieves equality in the end, for it trades power and possessions back and forth among the nations, so that each gets its turn at dominance in a never ending cycle,<sup>106</sup> like the citizens of a democracy in which offices are rotated and each gets his turn at ruling his fellows. Why does God allow a tyrant to rule? Because of the sins of the people. When their sins have been punished, the tyrant will be removed. Moreover, those who rule should make themselves subject to those who truly worship God.

Why is no sacrifice to the Emperor or the Gods allowed, even though obedience to the Emperor is enjoined? For one thing, the Romans, however much they might be God's instrument in disciplining the Jews, could not be the divinely appointed rulers who shared in God's prerogative. A king might be God's representative on earth and bearer of the law, but that would be the Messiah, not the Roman oppressors. Philo foresaw under the Messiah (which he equated with the Philosopher King of Plato) a 'democracy', a government in which all are equal before just laws, embracing the entire earth, in which the Jews would rule.

## 10. PHILO'S PHILOSOPHY

There are some who, understanding the letter of the laws to be a symbol of intellectual things, are very particular about the latter but readily neglect the former. I, for my part, should blame such unscrupulousness; for it is necessary to attend to both, the exact investigation of the things not manifest, and the uninterrupted preservation of the manifest. But now, as though living in a desert alone by themselves, or as having become bodiless souls, and knowing neither city nor village nor family, no association of men of any kind, looking contemptuously on the opinions of the many, they explore the naked truth itself by itself. The sacred word teaches that such men have conceived an excellent idea; but at the same time not to relax aught of what is found in the customs which inspired men, better than those of our time, have ordained.

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<sup>105</sup>Joseph 28–31.

<sup>106</sup>Decalogue 2 ff.

Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* xvi 89 f.<sup>107</sup>

In religious practice, Philo was careful to warn against any relapse into Paganism. His own intellectual tendencies, and his Platonizing bent with scriptures, presented a danger which he himself avoided by insisting on the regulation of philosophical speculation through tradition. Plato was all right, it seems, as long as it was found in Scripture through allegorical interpretation, and as long as the literal meaning of scripture was not ignored in the process.<sup>108</sup> The thing is an image for a more general point, of course, for the Jewish tradition is not to be abandoned for some purely philosophical life, any more than Scripture is to be abandoned for naked speculation. Worship, of course, is due only to the One supreme God, not to anything subordinate, and so the Pagan worship of idols is forbidden.<sup>109</sup> Here Philo misrepresents the Pagans, who, the more sophisticated, at least, did not worship cult statues, but the God, even if they would protect the cult object from profanation. Philo rejected the Pagan Mysteries as well, and denied that any Jew could participate lawfully in them. Indeed, the intellectual emphasis of Platonism is transformed in Philo's hands, and Plato becomes Jewish easily as much as the *Bible* becomes a source of Platonism, the abstract Platonic God becoming the personal, loving father Philo finds in the God of Abraham.<sup>110</sup>

Philo's God, indeed, is essentially Jewish, and is neither Platonic nor Stoic at base. He is transcendent, standing outside the world and in no way serving as its soul, and he creates the world order by an exercise of will, rather than the world order reflecting his nature. Moreover, Philo's God takes a personal interest in individuals, rather than, as the Greek notion would have it, providing a general sort of providence benefitting the universe as a whole. Indeed, in Philo's hands the intermediaries between God and the world, rather than bridging the gap between the abstract ideal and the individual realization of it in the natural world, as they do in Neoplatonism, serve to introduce the *general* concerns about the world as a whole found in Pagan philosophy, and God, when acting directly, remains the God of the covenant who takes an interest in individuals and individual nations.

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<sup>107</sup>Translation by G.F. Moore, cited in Goodenough (1962) 79.

<sup>108</sup>So *On the Cherubim* xii, where the 'divine and secret ordinances' are divulged only to initiates who have freed themselves from 'pride of language' and look beyond the letter of the *Torah* to its mystical doctrine.

<sup>109</sup>*On the Special Laws* II 165.

<sup>110</sup>For this section I rely especially on Goodenough (1962) 85 ff.

Philo lists three kinds of divine oracles, particular laws delivered by God in his own person, with the prophet as his interpreter, revelation through question and answer, and predictive prophecies spoken by Moses in his own person, though inspired by the divine spirit, so that his mind is a passive medium of transmission. The first sort of prophecy involves the prophet's own intellectual activity. In this sort of prophecy God creates a rational soul that shapes air into flames, and sends forth an articulate voice, which conveys the meanings directly, it seems, without dependence on ordinary sensory processes.<sup>111</sup> Here a mind to mind communication seems to be imagined, like that mentioned by Plutarch to explain Socrates's hearing of his *daimon*, "not spoken language, but the unuttered words of a *daimon*, making voiceless contact with his intelligence by their sense alone."<sup>112</sup>

Moses is the philosopher and sage whose mind is fully assimilated to the divine mind. His understanding of the Law transcends the precepts he sets forth to formulate it, and the actions of Moses and patriarchs breath forth the law and are a key to understanding it. The Law is rational, a natural law, inasmuch as God is the rational principle of the world.

Philo's knowledge of Greek philosophy is not deep, but that of an educated, "philosophical" fellow who knows the commonplaces. His assumption is that his audience will recognize the doctrines he discusses. In particular, the spirit of inquiry has not been imbibed. His philosophy is a set of doctrines and a commitment to a contemplative religion, not a method or a search for truth. He takes sides, generally with a Middle Platonic view over against a Stoic conception of an immanent God, and has something to say about Platonic problems, but only theoretical suggestions, no detailed arguments. In politics he blends a Jewish approach, as we have seen, with Cynicism. He is a scholar of the Jewish Scriptures first of all.

God above all *is*, for the immaterial alone has reality, and only God is fully real. This means that God is one, uncompounded of other things, and in no sense contained in the universe or dependent on anything outside himself.<sup>113</sup> In particular, nothing in the language we use to describe the universe is applicable to God,

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<sup>111</sup>*On the Decalogue* 35.

<sup>112</sup>*On the Genius of Socrates* 588d.

<sup>113</sup>*On the Creation of the World* ii insists that God is purely active, acting on matter, which is passive, and even producing the Forms. God's immanence in the world for a Platonist would seem to depend on identification of God with the Forms, which are immanent, in it, but Philo insists that God's only relation to the world or the Forms it is patterned on is that of active cause. So when he maintains in *On the Creation of the World* i that the Law is in accord with nature and that human beings, as citizens of the world, should live in accord with nature and the Law, this all presupposes that the Law is produced and imposed by God's free action. It is in accord with nature because God made things that way.

even in the way that a Platonist would want. God is, for the first time in Platonism, described as unnameable, unspeakable, and incomprehensible, for his existence can be known, but not his essence.<sup>114</sup> What Philo has done here is to capture the Jewish conception of the transcendent God within the Platonic view by insisting on Platonic metaphysical themes which rule out the typically Pagan immanent God one finds, for instance, in Stoicism. In doing this, he has to go one step past the Platonists, of course, for his God cannot be one from whom the universe evolves, but rather must be one who freely creates the universe.

God is good without qualification to Plato, and such goodness is mysterious enough in the *Republic* and in the *Timaeus*, but this is not the Jewish transcendence that Philo seeks for his God. Within Platonism, God's relation to the world is not one of power, but conceptual. The problem is that the good cannot be conceived by us except within a framework of differing, interrelated entities. So Good as it is in itself is inconceivable to us, even though it is conceptually prior to conditional goods. And it is similar for other notions applied to God—God is the ground for these notions in the world. For Plato, God is, ultimately, the logical ground of the universe, and so, despite his logical or metaphysical priority, dependent on the universe for what he is. As Hermogenes, criticized by Tertullian for his Platonic thought, suggests, if God must be the creator, and so is coeval with the world he creates, he cannot be unless it is. Tertullian and Philo take it that there is something, we know not what except being, that God is, in logical independence from the universe, so that God was before the universe was. Creation in time is in part a temporal image of this ontological independence of God.<sup>115</sup> Again, God's goodness transcends any goodness to be found in creation, and created things can participate in his goodness only to a limited extent, the limitation arising from the nature of the created thing rather than God's generosity. So created goodness is only a pale reflection of the divine goodness, which is beyond our conceiving, and real independently of anything created.<sup>116</sup>

This has a number of consequences. For one thing, the intermediaries between God and his world are the *powers* of God, not, as it is for the Platonists, the Good understood in the only way it can be if it is to be made actual in the world. So from the Logos as viewed by Philo there spring the the creative and ruling Powers

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<sup>114</sup>Dillon (1977) 155–156, citing *Somn.* I 67, *The Legation to Gaius* 6. The Powers that attend God manifest his existence, but not his essence—*Of the Posterity of Cain* 169. See Kahn (2001) 102–103.

<sup>115</sup>*On the Creation of the World* vii: There is no time before the world, for time requires motion (as its measure?), and so exists only if something can move. Still, the moment of creation is the first moment, and God's creation does not occur outside the temporal order, only at one limit of it.

<sup>116</sup>*On the Creation of the World* vi.

of God.<sup>117</sup> In scripture, the “Word of the Lord” is often semi-personified, as was the “Wisdom” of the Lord, for instance, and so Philo equates the two, and identifies them with the Logos.<sup>118</sup> These powers are all operations of God that appear separate to us, due to the weakness of our intellect (like the Amesha Spentas of Zoroastrianism), and in highest contemplation we see God as one.<sup>119</sup> The Logos might be viewed, then, as God’s mind, the Platonic world of forms, God’s plan for the world,<sup>120</sup> but it is not that from which the world evolves metaphysically, but an instrument by which the world is made. First God conceives the world, then in an act of power, he makes what he has conceived. The machinery by which God produces and rules the world, the shape of His Power, is ever present to Philo’s thought. Another consequence is that “all things are possible to God” (*Job* 42:1)—God is not limited in what he can do by the conceptual structure of reality as it is, or by matter, that is, the strict impossibility of realizing that conceptual structure in any except certain ways in actual individuals. So the world was made out of nothing, could be destroyed and made again differently, though God has promised not to do this. This was perceived as an absurdity by Pagan Platonists, whether they encountered it in Jews such as Philo or in the Christian Apologists who followed him in the matter.<sup>121</sup>

Philonic metaphors for the Logos include: a stream of powers emanating or flowing from God; God as the Sun from which its light and heat, its powers, stream forth; God as a king with the Logos and other powers as his ministers—so the Logos is the power of God in general, Goodness is God’s creative power,

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<sup>117</sup>*Questions and Answers on Exodus* II 68, cited in Kahn (2001) 102.

<sup>118</sup>Comparing this to *The Gospel of John*—the Word there is made Flesh and enters the world, rather than serving as an intermediary, and the Word is God, something that Philo would deny. Philo holds not to a Trinity, but to a single god, to whom the Word is strictly subordinate. Nonetheless, it seems that John’s Word is influenced by Philo’s, at least to the extent that the Jewish Hellenistic tradition Philo represents allows John to find the Word in the Jewish Scriptures.

<sup>119</sup>*Questions on Genesis* IV 8; *On Abraham* xxiv-xxv.

<sup>120</sup>*On the Creation of the World* iv-vi. Philo insists that God made two creations, the elder being the Forms, which are modeled on God Himself. The creation of forms is identified with the creation of light. (ch. viii) But these forms are in God’s mind, and so his making of them must be a matter of thinking them, rather like conceiving a plan for a work of art. God created both worlds in order to share his goodness with unformed matter. The impression is left that matter itself, mere unformed possibility with no goodness of its own, was simply present at the beginning, and no third creation of matter by God is mentioned, but neither is it explicitly ruled out.

<sup>121</sup>Wolfson (1961). The point may be somewhat overdrawn, for Philo does not ever seem to insist explicitly on creation *ex nihilo*. Still, his matter is not coordinate with the possibilities presented in the Forms, perhaps. At least it is imagined that the Forms could have been created differently. This perhaps means that even necessary truths about what is possible in the world are established by God, and could have been otherwise. This is the view of Descartes on the matter, as well. Matter is reduced to the mere possibility of created being.

Authority God's ruling power;<sup>122</sup> or, again, the Logos is God's reason, the law of nature, the ultimate reality contacted in mystic contemplation. From Goodness arises the Power of Mercy, from Authority the Power of giving the Law, from the Logos the Ideal World, the World of Forms.

How does World of Forms impress itself on the actual material world? Two accounts are given. One makes the World of Forms the conception of the Ideal World in God, of which the cosmos is a defective copy, defective because of weakness of matter.<sup>123</sup> God thus creates the Ideal World, as indicated in the opening verses of *Genesis*, and uses it as a pattern in his creation of the sensible world.<sup>124</sup> Following Plato, Philo seems to have conceived the disorderly matter as there independently of God, and he remarks that when God praised his creation, he praised not the matter subject to his creative activity, without soul, discordant, dissoluble, but only the works of his own art.<sup>125</sup> One wonders if matter was not in fact created by God, given that it is dissoluble—perhaps we are to take it that its imitation of the Forms could cease, and in that sense it is dissoluble, not that matter in itself could cease to be. In the other the world arises from a principle of unity and a “cutter” that splits the world into light and heavy, the four elements, etc. So we have the Monad and the unlimited Dyad repeatedly divided.<sup>126</sup> Philo is the earliest known author in whom, in a very important development within Platonism, the Forms are viewed as God's concepts, but it seems quite possible that Philo was displaying no originality here, and the view was already entrenched in Middle Platonism at the time he wrote. If he had anything new to say, it may have been that God *created* these concepts, rather than their arising somehow inevitably in God' mind.

As for the reconciliation of Plato and Genesis: Creation occurs in six days, for six is a perfect number, and so captures the notion of order. The first day is not called the first day, but one day, as the limit and element of number from which all arises.<sup>127</sup> The spirit moving over the waters is air, the Sun is fire, and so with

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<sup>122</sup>*On the Cherubim* 27 f.

<sup>123</sup>This is the view found in *On the Creation of the World*, 16. See Dillon (1977) 159.

<sup>124</sup>This creation occurs in eternity, not in time. There was no time before the creation of the world. *On the Creation of the World* 26.

<sup>125</sup>*Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, 160.

<sup>126</sup>This is the view found in *Who is the Heir of Divine things?*

<sup>127</sup>*On the Creation of the World* iii. A perfect number is one such that its factors add up to itself, so the factors of six are one, two and three. The creation first of all of the limit, and the monad, the element of all things, can be referred to the Pythagoreans and the Early Academy, of course.

the introduction of dry land we get the four elements of the Greeks.<sup>128</sup> On the fourth day human beings were made, and four contains the decad, implying the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres.<sup>129</sup> Animals were created on the fifth day because of the five senses, perception being what makes animals different from plants.<sup>130</sup> When God says “let us create man”, this indicates that God responsible for the good side of man, but since man can do evil due to his possession and possible misuse of reason, unlike the rest of creation, God had assistants who are assigned responsibility for the evil side, since no evil can be imputed to God. The stars are ensouled and rational, but, interestingly, incapable of vice.<sup>131</sup> When it is said that God breathed life into man, this means that God imparted reason as part of his divine spirit. Man is immortal in his intellect.<sup>132</sup> In connection with the story of the fall, Philo notes that nothing is unknown to God, and his asking of questions is not to be interpreted as indicating that anything is.<sup>133</sup> The fall itself is read here as due to sexual pleasure, which opposes reason.<sup>134</sup> The serpent is pleasure, which approaches the woman, standing for sensation, first, and then the man, standing for mind, who is seduced by the sensations.<sup>135</sup>

Human intelligence for Philo has something divine about it, and Pneuma, the ruling principle of the Stoics, is the intelligence breathed into us by God, and the image of God in man. So the breath of God is identified with the Platonic rational part of the soul. On the other hand, the mind is often said to be dependent on the body, and Philo sometimes seems to postulate a double mind, one earthly and one divine. The human person is a mixture of the divine intellectual part of the soul, the rest of the soul (whether the Stoic five senses, speech and generation, or the Platonic part that loves honor and desire), and the body.<sup>136</sup> These are all needed to constitute the individual, and there is no suggestion that the true self is really the rational part, which is

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<sup>128</sup>*On The Creation of the World* viii.

<sup>129</sup>*On the Creation of the World* xv–xvi.

<sup>130</sup>*On the Creation of the World* xx.

<sup>131</sup>*On the Creation of the World* xxiii.

<sup>132</sup>*On the Creation of the World* xlvi.

<sup>133</sup>*On the Creation of the World* lii.

<sup>134</sup>*On the Creation of the World* liii.

<sup>135</sup>*On the Creation of the World* lvi–lvii.

<sup>136</sup>From here one can move to St. Paul and the Spirit above the Soul, except that it ceases to be Platonic Reason.

somehow immortal. Like Plato, Philo insists that the highest part of the soul must rule, hence the combat between flesh and spirit is conceived along Platonic lines. Spirit (*pneuma*) is the most common name Philo gives to the higher, intellectual mind.

A new union with God, rooted in a sense of our weakness, is necessary to bring about Platonic justice within the soul. (This justice he also calls peace, harmony, virtue, salvation.) Virtue is a divine gift. Virtue is one, and Philo tends to cash this in by making each particular virtue of the five stand in for all the rest as the queen of the virtues when it is discussed. As in Plato, the internal state of the soul is the virtue, and external acts reveal this and are thus virtuous. He divides the decalogue into two halves, one dealing with relations to God, other with relations to people, and claims that we must have both sides, not only love of God but of fellow human beings, too. Justice in society is a matter of giving each his due, given his level of virtue.

Philo's attitude to slavery is not as enlightened as one could wish. Hebrew slaves are to be freed after seven years, and treated as a hired servant before they are freed, but Gentile slaves he only says are not to be treated like cattle. There is no sense of the importance of preserving human autonomy. He does not take the biblical injunction that a slave is to be freed if a tooth or eye is knocked out by his master as something that could have been meant literally, and so provides an elaborate allegorical reading of it, and though he allows that a master who kills his slave is to be executed, he also emphasizes the provision that exonerates the master if the slave lives two days after a flogging. The fact that a slave yields to punishment or the threat of punishment he takes to establish that he or she has a servile nature, and it is best that such should be slaves. His attitude to women is similarly no more than one might expect from his social background, and he holds that the father has unrestricted rights over his children, but condemns infanticide. He opposes punishing the innocent family of a serious offender, and argues that the punishment should fit the crime, turning the *lex talionis* to a provision of mercy in comparison to Roman practices. He speaks of kindness to enemies on occasion, recommending it as possibly bringing about friendship, and, for instance, states that a captive woman should not be used sexually for the first month to allow her time to mourn.<sup>137</sup>

He gives very different rules for the treatment of Jews and Gentiles, forbidding loaning money at interest to Jews, but not to Gentiles, for instance, and the laws applying to decent treatment of aliens he interprets as dealing with proselytes instead. So any Stoic universalism he may have picked up from his philosophy sits very uneasily with his Jewish particularism. He allows Egyptian converts in the third generation

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<sup>137</sup>Goodenough (1962) 118–129 for Philo's ethics.

to attend synagogue and hear the scriptures (the biblical law says that converts in the third generation may be admitted to the *Temple*)—that is, he had no interest in absorbing such converts into the community at all, and no doubt regarded them as dilettantes lacking in real commitment to obeying the Law. So his ethic in practice is what one would expect of a relatively enlightened member of his class, but it is not radical in the sense that it goes beyond what his class might consider acceptable, nor does it aim at serious social reform. His ethical commitments tended toward a concentration on ascetic discipline of the passions rather than social action or universal concern for the welfare of all people. It was not that Philo did not believe one ought to love all humanity, but that he honestly did not believe that everyone was capable of autonomy, or that the godless and vicious were appropriate objects of kindness, and he was convinced that the Gentiles were virtually all of them Godless and vicious. It has been pointed out that the Fathers of the *Talmud* are considerably kinder to those outside Judaism than is Philo. Much of Philo's experience of people is the experience of the upper class man of affairs, dealing with resentful underlings and exploitive and brutal Romans prejudiced against his people, and the occasional dilettantish intellectual intrigued by Jewish spirituality, and for all his interest in a life free of burdensome affairs, free for contemplation and intellectual work, he is used to being obeyed and respected, and used to his luxuries. He exercises self-control and moderation as only a rich man can.

Philo's mystical doctrine is based on experience of the direct vision of God in his simplicity above intellectual contemplation. This is connected to possession by God, *enthousiasmos* in Greek thought, but rooted in the notion of the Prophets' communication with God. As for the relation to Plato, he thinks we have to pass through a study of the sciences and especially mathematics, which help predispose us to virtue (exceptions to this general necessity are Isaac or Moses), but ought not to remain with them. We should pass beyond them to other concerns, just as Abraham first fathered a son with Hagar, the study of the sciences, but then had to send Hagar and Ishmael (the sophist and pedagogue) away so he could unite with Sarah, the Heavenly Wisdom who had urged Hagar on Abraham earlier. So he did not share Plato's program of rising to the Form of the Good through the study of the natural sciences and mathematics. His society, to tell the truth, had no faith in Plato's program of intellectual enlightenment, but even so, it ill fit his Judaism. His interest lay in a certain withdrawal from life to dwell with his God and the Sacred Scriptures, though this withdrawal did not mean an abandonment of the world, for one must conquer the problems of everyday life to succeed in the mystical quest, and the fully developed person returns to the cave, while remembering his true home. So, like Plato, Philo found the good in this world, but he found it in the social order, not in a scientific understanding of the world, except insofar as this understanding brings home to us God's providence and God's law as it works in

the world.

Philo discovers the mystery within Judaism through an allegorization of the *Torah* like the allegorization the philosophers were accustomed to apply to Pagan myths like that of Isis. He finds the mystic road in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. So Abraham left Chaldea when he rejected the view that the material world is the ultimately real. In Charan he renewed his study of the world and decided that there is an immaterial mind behind human actions, and this enabled God to give him his first revelation, of a being beyond material and immaterial natures who is the source of both. Abraham's name was then changed to indicate his new status as a sage. The next step was his union with Sarah, or Wisdom. At first he had to play a female role here, to receive the seeds of divine life and power. The three visitors at Mamre provided a vision of the Logos, God's Mercy = Creative Power, and God's Justice = Ruling Power. Having received the divine seeds, he could have intercourse with Sarah, and father (that is, become) Isaac, the Perfect Man. At this point God spoke to Abraham "no longer as a human being" but as the "Animate Law," the physician and guardian of the Jewish race, its intercessor and savior, who sought pardon for its sins from God.<sup>138</sup> Note that the contact with God is conceived as (1) occurring on behalf of the community, as contact with God had always occurred in Jewish thought, and (2) as allowing intercession for our sins. Isaac is represented as the son of God, begotten through God's seed, and so needed no instruction or development, but was perfect from the beginning. He was self-taught, and not by reason, but through divine madness.<sup>139</sup> Isaac's conversation with Rebecca at the well is described as "laughter free from sadness" conversing with Wisdom, "immune from great evils, ignorance and disorder," receiving from her the Logos itself. This occurs when Isaac has gone out in the evening to meditate, that is, in the night resulting from the cessation of intellect, in solitude beyond all visible things. Rebecca is Wisdom just as Sarah is, and so Isaac is in effect reunited with his mother, the mother of all things, in the wedding chamber. Yet both Sarah and Rebecca are eternally virgin, for they stand beyond all re-union, are union itself uninterrupted.<sup>140</sup> Moses, like Isaac, is perfect at birth, though the career of Jacob is like that of Abraham, the career of a human being who must rise through the intellect to the point of abandoning intellect. Moses is the perfect King.

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<sup>138</sup> *Questions on Genesis* III 10, 44 for the last point.

<sup>139</sup> *Mut.* 131.

<sup>140</sup> *Questions on Genesis* IV 138–140.

## 11. LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN ZOROASTRIANISM

Let us leave off Jewish thought for now and turn to later developments in Iran. Among the later Achaemenids there were considerable attempts to compromise the exclusivity of Zoroastrianism to mollify the other religions in the Empire. The use of cult statues, for instance, was probably due to the Persian adoption of the Babylonian cults of Ishtar (renamed Anahitis, goddess of the planet Venus), Nabu (renamed Tiri, god of the planet Mercury), and the Sun God Shamash (assimilated to Mithra). Artaxerxes II forced the Magi to find room for these deities in the Zoroastrian faith. The Queen Mother, Parysatis, was half Babylonian, and perhaps had learned to worship Ishtar from her mother, and it may be she who prevailed on Artaxerxes to place the goddess's statues in temple buildings. Shamash had been adopted by the Persians before they ever became Zoroastrians, for reasons of state. The more orthodox Zoroastrians responded by setting up their own temples, with a sacred fire maintained in ritual purity in place of the cult statue, and so thereafter worship was no longer carried out exclusively in the open air.<sup>141</sup> The religious calendar of the Zoroastrians, still in use today, was also established in late Achaemenid times. It rotates around seven obligatory feasts, supposedly founded by the Prophet himself, in honor of Ahura Mazda the creator, and the six great Amesha Spentas.<sup>142</sup>

With the fall of the Persian Empire, Zoroastrianism, which had become a state religion, suffered terribly at the hands of the Macedonian troops of Alexander, known to the Zoroastrians thereafter as "the accursed." So many priests were killed that many oral traditions were lost, and we now have only a part of the old scriptures preserved in those traditions. The religion retreated to the countryside for a while, for the cities were Hellenized, and many of them had even been founded as Greek colonies. In the 240's BCE the Greeks were finally pushed out of Persia by the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, and by 141 Mithridates had reached the Tigris. The Arsacids did not attempt central control of the religious life of the nation, and they continued the tolerant policies of the Achaemenids toward other religions. But with the accession of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sassanian line, who overthrew the Arsacid king in 224 CE, things changed. Ardashir deliberately centralized and reformed the religion as part of a nationalist program. In particular, the polytheistic tendencies, and image worship, of the later Achaemenids, rooted as they were in the need to pacify the other religions

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<sup>141</sup>Boyce (1984) 303–304. The practice of worship in the open air was another parallel between Judaism and Zoroastrianism, rooted in their common nomadic heritage, that could have contributed to mutual respect.

<sup>142</sup>Boyce (1984) 305.

within the old empire, did not appeal to the Sassanians, and most parts of the *Avestas* reflecting these compromises did not survive in the new, authorized Pahlavi translation of the scriptures now imposed on the nation. The cult statues were replaced with sacred fires.<sup>143</sup> Later in this dynasty, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Shapur II and his high Priest, Karter, began to persecute the Christians, and we have many Christian records of court proceedings against them, generally resulting in martyrdom. The Zoroastrians found Christian burial a pollution of the earth, and they thought the Christian refusal to worship the sun, with many other practices, blasphemous, but they seem never to have been determined enough in their persecutions (which were matched by Roman persecutions of the Zoroastrians in the eastern part of the Empire) to extirpate the religion, and even Khosrow II had an Armenian Christian wife.<sup>144</sup> Religious affairs masked imperial ambition in both Rome and Persia. In particular, Christian Armenia, laid under protection by Constantine and claimed by the Sassanians as lying within their own sphere of influence, provided a pretext for war, as did complaints that Zoroastrians were persecuted by the Romans in their eastern provinces. The memory of Alexander and the Achaemenid empire he destroyed was invoked as justification for Persian attempts to recapture the Middle East, and Khosrow II (590–628 CE) finally succeeded in its reconquest from the Christian Byzantine Empire, though his victory was followed quickly by a Byzantine counterattack, and then the collapse of Sassanian Persia before the Muslim armies of Arabia.<sup>145</sup>

Under the Sassanians there were at least three different sects of Zoroastrians, differing in the way in which they approached the dualism of the religion. They can most readily be understood as providing alternate readings of *Yasna* 30.3–4, which speaks of two spirits, twins, one of whom chose the lie, and the other truth. The Pahlavi books, and Zoroastrian orthodoxy, followed Zarathustra in holding that Ahura Mazda and Ahriman were coeternal and equal in power, though the victory of Ahura Mazda was to be expected. A second view, regarded as heretical in the orthodox tradition, maintained that Ahura Mazda had created the Destructive Spirit, Ahriman. The third approach was that of the Zurvanites, who held that Infinite Time, Zurvan Akarana, had given rise both to Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. This group must have looked on Infinite Time as the highest God, for Mani (ca. 216 – ca. 276 CE), the founder of Manichaeism, a syncretist Iranian religion of which we

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<sup>143</sup>Boyce (1979) 102–103.

<sup>144</sup>Boyce (1979) 118–123. For a discussion of Zoroastrianism as the state religion of the Sassanians, see Fowden (1993) 24–35.

<sup>145</sup>Fowden (1993) 29–30.

will give an account below, called his God Infinite Time in Iranian circles.

Zurvanism was the official view under the first two Sassanian emperors, and the third, Shapur I (240–272), supported a systematization of theology, collecting and editing all the writings of the religion, theological, philosophical and scientific alike, with the intention of making it more tolerant and eclectic, and, especially, more friendly to Manichaeism. But upon Shapur's death the high priest, Karter, initiated a persecution of the other religions in the Empire, including Manichaeism, Mandaeanism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Zurvanism lost its position in the struggle, and was never again regarded as orthodox. Khusro I (531–579) supplemented persecution with the establishment of schools in which missionaries studied the literature of the Indians and Greeks so they could be more effective against them. When the Muslims overran the Empire, Zoroastrianism came under Muslim persecution, and retreated to the minority religion it is today.

## 12. ZURVANISM

Zurvanism existed as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, for it is attested by Eudemus, Aristotle's student.<sup>146</sup> In fact, it may be that the later Achaemenids were Zurvanites—at least this would explain the later influence of the heresy. It occurred in two forms in Sassanian times, a mythological form making Infinite Time a personal entity, and a materialist form, making Infinite Time impersonal, so that good and evil arose from infinite time and space through natural processes. This form of the doctrine seems to have held that there was no end or beginning to things, nor any heaven or hell. It may have adopted an astrological fatalism, though it is not clear whether the fatalists formed another school entirely. According to the fatalists, in any case, the lives of men are controlled by Finite Time, that is, the influence of the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which belong to the Good Spirit, together with the influence of the seven planets, which are the Evil Spirit's and intercept and unjustly redistribute the good things produced by the constellations. The whole system is no doubt in part a result of the influence of Greek and Indian science. The materialist form of Zurvanism was considered heretical by the orthodox because of its denial of heaven and hell, free will, and Ahura Mazda's creation of the world. Manichaeism and Gnosticism were regarded as heretical because they denied the goodness of the world created by Ahura Mazda. The Zurvanites tended to be invisible to the faithful, much like the Valentinian Gnostics in the Christian milieu, because their heresy did not modify existing doctrine, or change any existing

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<sup>146</sup>Boyce (1984) 306.

practice. It only added new doctrines which altered the meaning of what was there before. Hence a Zurvanite could profess and do whatever a faithful Zoroastrian might do, and though he might interpret his professions and actions differently from the faithful, the faithful would not know this. Manichaeans attempted the same strategy to get themselves tolerated by the Zoroastrians.<sup>147</sup>

The myth of the non-materialistic Zurvanites ran as follows: Infinite Time did long sacrifice in order to get a son. (Compare the *Vedas*, in which asceticism is the standard technique for accomplishing anything great, even among the gods.) At the last moment, he doubted if he could carry it off, and thus conceived Ahura Mazda through his sacrifice, and Ahriman through his doubt. (This becomes a Gnostic theme.) He decided to give the rulership of the world to the first son to approach him, and Ahriman, gaining wind of this, forced his way out of the womb first, and presented himself. But he was dark, stinking and cold, not warm, fragrant and bright like Ahura Mazda, and so Infinite Time wished to give the world to his second son. But, reminded of his vow, he gave the world to Ahriman for nine thousand years.

According to the Zurvanites, the twin spirits are good and evil by choice, not by essential nature. So Ahriman created the peacock, proving he could do good, and did only evil thereafter. The orthodox view makes the two good and evil in their substance, so that neither could change or choose the way of the other. The Zurvanites, no doubt, wished to emphasize that there is always a choice between good and evil, and that one is always free to make the choice one way or the other. Again, the Zurvanites limit Ahura Mazda's power and wisdom, and make Ahriman clever and powerful, whereas the orthodox insist on Ahriman's stupidity, and Ahura Mazda's perfection.

Infinite Time delivered weapons to the twins to conduct their struggle. Ahriman's weapon is Az, concupiscence, a demon that demands living things to devour in her endless hunger, and at the end, when there is no food left for her, because living beings are no longer dying, she will turn on the other demons, and even on Ahriman himself, to devour them. To prevent this, Ahriman, in one version of the myth, has deceived the creatures of Ohrmazd, making them think he is their creator. The weapon of Ohrmazd is Endless Form, that is, the whole material creation contained within the circuit of the sky. It is fashioned from endless light, and contains both spirits and matter. This Endless Form is the embodiment of the finite Zurvan, that is, it is eternity made finite, Infinite Time given finite expression. Here Platonism (compare the *Timaeus*) seems to have had

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<sup>147</sup>Boyce (1979) 67–70.

some influence.<sup>148</sup>

A persistent tradition held that in the early days of the world woman somehow defected to Ahriman, even though she is a creature of Ohrmazd. One Zurvanite source says that after Woman had gone over to Ahriman, Ohrmazd, to prevent her from having intercourse with the Righteous Man, tempted her with a handsome youth, which she then requested from Ahriman in place of the Righteous Man. This seems like Manichaean revisionism, with its clear implication that reproduction is a device of Ahriman. A more authoritative source reports that after Ahriman's 3000 year swoon upon seeing Ohrmazd's weapon, the Whore came to him and related the evil deeds she would do, destroying the dignity of the Righteous Man and the Bull. Ahriman, revived by this prospect, promised to give her whatever she wanted, and Ohrmazd showed one like a fifteen year old boy to her behind Ahriman's back. She cried out that she wanted to desire Man that he might become her lord. Ahriman had to keep his promise, and this led to the reproduction of Righteous Man, keeping the game alive despite Ahriman's introduction of death into the world. Thus, more in keeping with Zoroastrian tradition, reproduction is regarded as a device of the Holy Spirit, not of Ahriman, by which Ohrmazd is enabled eventually to restore the fortunes of his creatures.

### 13. ORTHODOX ZOROASTRIANISM

In the view of orthodox Zoroastrianism even the mythological form of Zurvanism is pernicious heresy. First of all, it suggests that Ohrmazd has some admixture of evil or weakness, instead of utterly separating good and evil from one another. This means that humanity, perhaps, cannot be expected to be completely good after shaking off the influence of Ahriman, and it makes Ohrmazd less than a completely suitable object of worship.

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<sup>148</sup>In the Pahlavi books of the Sassanians the world is considered to have two aspects, the *menog* (Avestan *Mainyu*) and the *getig* (Avestan *astvant*), roughly, ideal existence in the mind, or on the plane of spirits, and actual existence on the physical plane. Creation was supposed to have proceeded in three stages, the creation of ideal existence or of the spirits, the creation of actual existence in the ideal, and the creation of actual material existence. The idea is, perhaps, that the world is first conceived by God, then the ways in which the things conceived are going to have to be realized in actual matter are worked out, and then the actual material world is made. Since conception within God gives rise to spirits that are aspects of God, ideal existence is attributed to abstract qualities such as truth, to corresponding qualities in the individual, such as truthfulness, and to a personified power, the Spenta, Truth. It is notable that Ahriman is not supposed to have any actual existence, but only existence on the ideal plane. The notion is probably that he cannot be realized in physical actuality, for evil is, in actuality, a mere nothing, a disturbance in or absence of the good. If it were not for the good world, evil could not be at all. Ahriman is purely a spirit of destruction, and in no way a spirit of creation. Thus, once the evil one is expelled from the good world, he will have no further being of his own, no further power in actual things, and be nothing beyond the mere possibility of destructive activity. So he will be unconscious, incapable of activity, forever after. At the end of things the actual universe is supposed to come closer to its ideal existence, that is, be perfected. All of this strongly suggests Platonism, but it probably comes out of native thought. The notion that a god creates by conceiving something in his mind, and then producing it in actuality, is commonplace in ancient religions long before Plato enters the picture. Shaul Shaked () 322, 316-317.

Moreover, its dabbling in astrology undermines the conviction that human beings can freely choose what side to take in the struggle.<sup>149</sup>

On the orthodox view, Ohrmazd and Ahriman are coeternal. Ohrmazd, realizing that the finite Ahriman will desire his light, created Endless Form, a finite but deathless manifestation of himself, as the weapon to be used against him when he made his attack. Ahriman, meanwhile, saw the light of Ohrmazd and desired it, but upon approaching it he realized he could not fight Ohrmazd alone, and went back to his home to fashion demons. Thus three thousand years passed. Ahriman's chief weapon is Az, or Concupiscence, his own darkness and disorder. It is in the course of the struggle that Ohrmazd first becomes aware of himself, for he can be known, even by himself, only in his finite form. He first knows himself as Wisdom and Power, then as Mercy. When the latter knowledge arose, Ohrmazd offered peace to Ahriman, and a share in his own eternity, but Ahriman, suspicious of his motives, turned him down. Battle was joined, and Ohrmazd recited a prayer that inaugurated the Good Religion, laying Ahriman prostrate for three thousand years. Ohrmazd had gotten Ahriman to specify a time when the fight would occur, and it is only for this reason that victory is assured. Is this due to the impossibility of otherwise bringing his foe to grips?

In any case, the heavenly sphere is created, and Ahriman attacks it, breaking in at the bottom and laying everything waste. But the sphere is a trap, and Ahriman cannot get out again, and the sky begins to regenerate the things that have been destroyed. In the end Az, who finds nothing further that can be devoured once death is overcome, turns on her creator and destroys him. In some versions Ohrmazd rescues Ahriman from Az, returning him to the darkness through a hole in the heavens, and Ahriman remains there, unconscious, for all eternity. Ohrmazd, of course, does not win his victory by aggression, but by frustrating the life-destroying powers of aggression, and so bringing things to the point where the aggressor turns on himself. But to do this, he must prevent Ahriman from withdrawing from the scene, and hence the trap is necessary.

A human couple springs miraculously from the seed of the First Man, but they go astray quickly. In the six thousand years during which Ahriman is trapped within the sphere is spent in the gradual regeneration

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<sup>149</sup>Some, for instance, Shaked ( ) 318–320, argue that the talk about choice in orthodox Zoroastrian literature does not mean that a doctrine of freedom of will was present. But his discussion of *Denkard* VI D1a, here, suggests otherwise. He points out that Sassanid sources hold that human functioning is affected by five things. The first is fate, which determines one's livelihood, no doubt because one's profession is inherited from one's father, as well as one's wife and children and so on. Fate determines whatever happens to one by the chance of one's birth and circumstances. The second factor is habit, which seems to include all the activities inherent in human nature, including natural bodily functions. The third is one's own nature, which determines one's inherent personality. The fourth is heredity, from which one's intellectual powers derive. The last is action, one's choice of good or evil. Shaked suggests that this makes the area of choice pretty narrow, but even if it does (and there is no indication that choice cannot resist the influence of one's nature and the like), it surely emphasizes that one has free choice where it matters, in ethical decision making.

of their descendants. Human beings are Good Spirits, Fravashis, whose souls descend into bodies to do battle with Ahriman, and in the end all will be recovered again. Some will be recovered directly, but even those trapped in Ahriman's hell will eventually stage a revolt, and, passing through a river of molten lead, be purified and attain to heaven. Thus the earlier views about heaven and hell are, by a supplementary tale, converted to universal salvation.

A central theme in the orthodox mythology is the conversion of Ahriman's weapon, concupiscence and destruction, to the ends of reproduction and creation. This is reflected early in the career of the religion in the tale of Ahriman's slaying of the Bull, which backfires, so that from this destruction arises plant and animal life. Clearly a pacifist ethic is implicit here. Evil is not to be resisted with its own weapons, destruction and violence. Rather, we are to bring something constructive from the weapons of evil, showing mercy to the evil doer and converting him to good. The passive goodness of Ohrmazd in the Zurvanite myth is very different from his aggressive hostility to Ahriman in the original views of Zarathustra. There the evil one is destroyed by purifying streams of molten metal, not by his own devices. The subtle pacifism of the Zurvanite view is reflected in Gnosticism as well, and seem to reflect an Iranian rethinking of the opposition of good and evil, perhaps in the centuries before and after the birth of Christ. There may be even more here, for Ohrmazd attains self-consciousness only in his struggle with Ahriman, though he remains self-conscious after the struggle is over, since his creation remains eternal. Perhaps the struggle is essential for the creation of a finitely realized good. There seems to be some Platonic influence in all of this, or at least a parallel insight into the necessity of falling away from the ideal if the ideal is to be actualized.

#### **14. THE FOUNDING OF MANICHAEANISM**

He who has chosen his Church in the West [Jesus], his Church has not reached the East; the choice of him who has chosen his Church in the East [Zarathustra] has not come to the West... But my Hope [as Mani often called his teaching] will go towards the West, and she will go also towards the East. And they shall hear the voice of her message in all languages, and shall proclaim her in all cities. My Church is superior in this first point to previous Churches, for these previous Churches were chosen in particular countries and in particular cities. My Church shall spread in all cities, and its Gospel shall reach every country.

Mani, *Kephalia* 154<sup>150</sup>

The prophet **Mani** was born in Babylonia, at that time part of Parthia, around 216 CE. He seems to have been of Persian descent, but related to the royal house, which was overthrown by Ardashir, the first of the Sassanids, when he was ten years old. He grew up in a Jewish-Christian sect in Mesopotamia, and would have become familiar with Marcion and Gnosticism (See Chapters 3 and 5 below). His religious vision is essentially Gnostic. He began preaching in his twenties, with a journey to India, where he made his first converts. He viewed his doctrine as just one revelation from the true God in a long line of predecessors, including Buddha, Zarathustra and Jesus, and quite self-consciously imitated Paul's missionary journeys.<sup>151</sup> He claimed to supersede the earlier prophets, while at the same time drawing on what was already familiar to those in their separate traditions to instruct and convert them. Thus, in the Roman Empire the religion presented itself as a form of Christianity, while in China it took on the form of Buddhism. Its use of the religious stories of every tradition for its own purposes led to the transmission of many parables from one region and faith to another over time. The religion, popular especially among international merchants, who comprised many of the elect apostles of the faith, eventually spread as far as Roman Africa in the West (first appearing in the Roman Empire in the 240's, Diocletian imposing the death penalty for adherence to the religion in 296), and China in the East. Despite his universalistic ambitions, Mani was aware of the advantages of a state religion, and Buddhist fashion, aimed immediately at the conversion of the King upon arrival in the Indian country where he began his mission. He succeeded, but it seems his teachings were not able to take root, and died out quickly. Upon the death of Ardashir in 241 he returned to Persia, perhaps invited by Shapur, Ardashir's successor. At any rate he wrote a book for Shapur, the *Shapurakan*.) His deliberate syncretism and tolerance appealed to Shapur, suggesting his faith as a possible universal religion for the Empire, reconciling the various peoples under his rule, but the Magian priests bitterly opposed Mani, and in the end Shapur did not convert. When Bahram succeeded Shapur in 272 the Magi launched a general persecution of every religion other than Zoroastrianism with the support of the new king. Zoroastrianism, not Mani's religion, would be the state religion of the

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<sup>150</sup>Cited in Fowden (1993) 72. Translation by Stevenson, in Frend (1987) 266, emended by Fowden.

<sup>151</sup>Fowden (1993) 73. For Manichaeism in general, see especially the introduction to Klimkeit (1993), Jonas (1963) ch. 9.

Parthians. Mani was executed about 276, by crucifixion.<sup>152</sup>

Mani insisted that the good and evil principles were coeval.<sup>153</sup> God has five powers of mind, called his “limbs” or “dwellings,” which become, as it were, independent persons: Reason, Mind, Intelligence, Thought, and Understanding. The five limbs of God, together with his Light, his Power, and his Wisdom, make up a Quaternity, the fourfold Father of Greatness. Countless Aeons spread out from this Godhead, the central twelve, three in each direction, being called the “Firstborn of the Father.” Associated with the Father is the Great Spirit, who is the preexistent form of the Mother of the Living. The Evil One similarly has Smoke, Fire, Wind, Fog or Water, and Darkness as its five qualities, five dark worlds of lust and desire, associated with bipeds, quadrupeds, flying creatures, swimming creatures, and crawling creatures, all ruled by Ahriman.<sup>154</sup> At first the realms of light and darkness were entirely separate from one another, but the Evil Realm is involved in constant internal warfare, each member of the realm seeing only his own point of view and having no better response to another than to attack it, and eventually this fighting led to the boundaries of this realm, where light was seen and coveted, and the evil powers gathered together and made plans to attack and seize the light. There is a great error here, of course, for the powers of Darkness cannot think of anything better to do when perceiving the good than to seize it and control it, which means it can never truly be possessed by them, for they cannot *live* it. The Manichaeans do not think the Light ought to reveal itself to the Darkness, or form or shape the Darkness, for the Darkness cannot profit from this, and is best left in peace to pursue its own nature without the temptations and turmoil that the perception of the Light introduces.<sup>155</sup> At any rate, the good God had no violent means to defend himself, and so called forth the Mother of the Living, who called forth Man in her turn. The First Man, armed with the five Elements of Light, Ether, Wind, Light, Water and Fire, fought, and was defeated and devoured by the powers of evil, who, sated, then retired. This was the First Messenger.

Now the light (soul = *pneuma*, not *psyche*, which is only a sublimated matter), when it was eaten by the darkness, poisoned and killed it, that is, somehow rendered it incapable of offensive action, though it still

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<sup>152</sup>Wilson (1967). Aside from the *Shapurakan*, he apparently wrote a work entitled “The Living Gospel,” and, according to Augustine, a collection of *Epistula Fundamenti* used by North African Manichaeans as a handbook of the doctrine. Manichaean texts are extant in Coptic (from Egypt), Iranian, Chinese, and Turkish.

<sup>153</sup>The summary of Manichaean views is taken chiefly from the introduction to Klimkeit (1993) and Jonas (1963).

<sup>154</sup>Or so the Persian sources name it. Greek sources almost always refer to the Evil One as *Hyle*, or matter, but this is not really a Neoplatonic notion, even if, as seems to be the case, it was the usual term used by Mani himself. “Matter” is a positively evil person. The Arabic sources refer to the Evil One as Iblis (a corruption of *Diabolos*).

<sup>155</sup>This would, of course, distinguish Manichaeism from any form of Platonism.

fights to retain the light within itself. But now the light, the arms and armor of the First Man, has to be rescued. This means that The First Man has to be roused from his stupor and ignorance, and for this purpose, the Father sent forth the Second Messenger, the Friend of Lights, from which arose The Great Builder, which produced The Living Spirit, from which derived five sons who aided in forming and maintaining the Cosmos, the King of Splendor, the King of Honor, the Adamas of Light, the King of Glory, and Atlas. Living Spirit sent a Call from the boundary with the world of darkness to The First Man, who heard the Call and responded with the Answer. Call and Answer, new persons, rose to the realm of light. The First Man, now aware of himself, was thus saved, but we individual humans are not this First Man, but rather his five limbs, which can only be saved when the sixth limb, Answer, is evoked by Call. Call and Answer together are The Thought of Life. Out of the corpse of darkness Living Spirit now fashioned the world, which is a vast machine for winnowing out the soul that remains after the First Man has left, and conveying it, via the moon and spheres, back to the light. Living Spirit created the sun and moon, the collectors of soul, which moves the light from there to the Realm of Light, from the purest light still remaining in the realm of evil. The revolution of the spheres is a giant engine for the purification of light and its transportation to the world of light.

A third messenger was then sent, who called forth a Maiden of Light, who entered the Moon. When she, in her manifestation as twelve maidens, revealed herself to the evil Archons, they ejaculated much soul, which was transported to the realm of light, but some of it was mixed with darkness, and so could not be saved in this way. Of the soul mixed with darkness, some fell into the ocean, and from it a giant arose, who was overcome by Adamas. Some fell to the earth, producing plants. The female Archons, upon seeing the Maidens of Light, miscarried, and their children became the five sorts of animals corresponding to the five sorts of demons. The Third Messenger then called forth the Column of Glory or The Perfect Man (the Milky Way), the path by which light travels back home, by way of the New Paradise, built by the Great Builder at the behest of Living Spirit, and ruled by the First Man, a place of rest for the gods involved in the cosmic battle, and a stop on the way for the rescued souls. Other gods called forth at this point include Jesus the Splendor, and the Great Nous and its five limbs, paralleling those of the Father.

The darkness, or *hyle* (matter), in its manifestation as Az, the female Demon of Greed, then bound what light it had left in Adam and Eve, formed in the image of the messenger, and sexual reproduction was used to disperse the light, making it harder to recover. Jesus was sent to warn Adam, and got him to eat the fruit of knowledge and resort to continence to overcome Greed, but Eve was seduced by a demon, bore Cain and Abel, and then seduced Adam when both came under the influence of demons. Jesus, the Maiden of Light

and the Great Nous often appear together as a triad of redeemers.

The task of human beings is to rouse themselves from forgetfulness of who they are, and to vanquish evil (darkness) by overcoming the negative side of soul (*psyche*) through ethical practice. A perfect practice of ethics is impossible in this world, but regular confession helps. Those who have accomplished the aim will join the gods upon death, clothed not in the body, but in a heavenly garment, to aid them in freeing all the remaining elements of light from the darkness. The Elect only, who follow five precepts of truthfulness, non-injury, abstention from sexual conduct, “purity of mouth,” and poverty, will attain Paradise, but those who follow a more permissive rule, but one that still rules out killing, lying, making false accusations, unchastity, stealing and black magic, will be reborn as elect, and attain Paradise in their next rebirth. There are various Hells, and a Zoroastrian inspired judgment after death as well. The gradual elimination of light from the world, as the gods do their work, will eventually result in greater and greater evil here, until, in the midst of a great war, Jesus will come again to rule as a great king, judging the quick and the dead. The elect will become angels, and the sinners will be sent to damnation. When Jesus at last returns to the Realm of Light, and all the other gods return as well, the world, unsupported and unstructured by any remaining good, will be destroyed in a great fire. The last remaining elements of light that can be saved will be gathered together and brought out, and, according to some, no light will remain at all, while according to others, some small residuum of unsalvageable light, the damned, will be trapped forever in the frozen lump of darkness that remains.

Jesus has a three-fold aspect in this doctrine. He is the Splendor, the Judge at the end of the world, and the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering Jesus. Only this last appears to be human, but his suffering is symbolic of the travail of Light in this world of darkness, of the living self tied to matter. The work of all great religious prophets is that of the Great Nous, who inspires them all, and is called “The Father of the Apostles.” There are (surprisingly minor) variations on this complicated cosmological scheme from East and West, and there are many more details, but the drive and nature of the whole should be clear from what is provided here.

In presentation, these ideas differ widely depending on the dominant religion where they were to be presented. So Chinese Manichaean texts read like Buddhist Sutras, with references to “Buddha nature” (the light that is our soul and must be restored to the Godhead), “Buddhas” (messengers of the Light), and even individual Bodhisattvas, so that Avalokiteshvara is identified with the Call, and Mahasthamaprapta with Answer.<sup>156</sup> But with all the adaptability in terminology and presentation, Manichaeans always retained their own religious

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<sup>156</sup>Klimkeit (1993) 5.

outlook in clear view, even though it was radically opposed to the outlook of the religions they imitated. The natural reaction of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims or Zoroastrians who saw their views and language subverted in Manichaean works, was bound to be anger, and the conviction that they were dealing with the worst sort of heretical caricature of their own religion.

Manichaeism is a gnostic religion. Its vision is rooted in the notion that salvation comes when we recognize who we are, and recognize this in such a way as to repudiate our worldly selves, with all our evil emotions, as not truly ourselves. St. Augustine viewed this as a spiritual mistake, for it leads us to a kind of pride, and a failure to recognize our real sinfulness, and our distance from God. Whether these are good points or bad, he is certainly right that Manichaeans will not view themselves as in any way radically defective. The sense of sin is due to a mistake about who we are. Sin comes from without our true selves. Moreover, they see no distance between their true selves and God, holding that, in the end, they are one with God. Augustine would argue, no doubt, that this misunderstands the situation completely, and leads to spiritual disaster, since we cannot come to God as long as we are proud and do not recognize our sin as ours. A Buddhist, too, would have found a fundamental mistake here, though for a different reason—the error that there is a self cannot be penetrated by taking one's self to be blissful and perfect, and the recognition that there is no way for one's self to avoid suffering is the first step on the correct road.

But however these things may be, the Manichaeans were not latitudinarian. The self could only be purified and made suitable to transmigrate to the Realm of Light, on their view, if morality was strictly followed, and they insisted on confession of sins so that the gods could aid us in our efforts. Perhaps they viewed morality as a means to an end, to the liberation of the Light, but even here one must be careful—they did think that the Light was intrinsically to be valued, and to be loved, so that no one who really saw would be capable of harming others.

The most rigorous application of the Manichaean ethical vision was restricted to the “elect,” who endeavored to purify their own souls to the point where they could escape this world without further rebirth, an aim considerably moderated by most of the faithful, the “soldiers,” in view of the ascetic practices entailed. The Manichaean elect, very like those of the Jains with the highest spiritual aims, rendered themselves as passive as possible to avoid harming other things, not only restricting themselves to a vegetarian diet, but, for instance, avoiding walking so far as possible so that they could avoid treading on small insects and plants. The elect refrained from sex and procreation so as not to further divide the soul within them, and lived in poverty, avoiding the use of houses, for instance, so they would not become involved in the world. The soldiers hoped

eventually to become one of the elect in a future rebirth, while “fleshly persons” go to Hell.

Why did the religion not succeed better than it did? Well, for one thing, it certainly succeeded up to a point, spreading far and enjoying large numbers of adherents for a long time. But it did not become the state religion of an Empire, and so eventually it met its end. Why did it fail to get a foothold in any empire? One suggestion would be that although its cosmic drama is unconnected with any particular national history, and readily assimilated local religions of every sort, its multicultural background made it an unlikely candidate for a state religion, a local candidate with local attachments almost always being available, and so it suffered persecution almost everywhere from more narrowly focused faiths. It drew fire even from tolerant majority faiths, which saw the Manichaeans as a spiritually blind organization of pretenders, trying to look like what they were not in order to mislead the faithful. Moreover, the religion lacked a strong internal government, doing without formal church buildings in the West, for instance, its scattered and independent cells being held together largely by occasional visits by the Elect for the sake of instruction in doctrine. It has also been suggested that only the Elect, a small group at best, could observe all the injunctions of the faith, but the ability of the religion to spread and establish itself suggests that the laymen enjoyed sufficient participation in its ideals so that they felt a real commitment to it. On this point the Manichaeans followed very much the strategy of the Buddhists, with their two tiers of practice, and very different rewards at each of the tiers, not the practice of the single tiered Christian faith. But the Buddhists were certainly able to establish themselves as a popular religion. What Manichaeism became was a personal religion of locally autonomous congregations, represented in the Eurasian world wherever it was not persecuted out of existence, but without connections to the state. The one exception to this characterization is its status as the state religion of the Uighur Turks on the northern Frontier of China from 762 to 840, where an extensive monastic establishment goes some distance toward explaining its success in this part of the world. But even where this one success was attained the religion did not become the only, or perhaps even the majority, religion, for it did not, for all its proselytizing, persecute its opponents.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Fowden (1993) 72–76.