

# From Jesus to the Church

*The First Christian Generation*

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# Introduction

When Jesus of Nazareth entered Jerusalem, shortly before Passover, and quarreled with the ruling priests, he set in motion a chain of events that would change the world. The purpose of this book is to examine the first link in this chain. This link is made up of the first generation of the Jesus movement, a movement centered in Jerusalem. It was almost entirely Jewish and was very much focused on the redemption and restoration of Israel.

Even during the first forty years, with the Jesus movement and the temple establishment fiercely competing for the hearts of the Jewish people, there was never any thought that the Jesus movement was somehow not Jewish or outside the boundaries of the nation of Israel and its great heritage. The Messianists, who up north in Antioch became known as *Christianoi*, or “Christians,” were viewed as a Jewish sect (or *hairesis*), as were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

The death of James, the capture of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple changed the dynamics of Jewish society and, along with it, the relationship of the Messianists with their non-Messianist Jewish brothers and sisters. The Gentile branch of the church, energetically planted and deeply watered by Paul and other Jewish missionaries, rapidly expanding across the Roman Empire, soon dominated. Although the Jewish branch of the church did not cease, it did recede and in time exerted little influence. By the second century, especially in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the movement that Jesus had launched and that his apostles had spread had become largely a Gentile affair.

The present study is not a history of the early church; it is not even a history of its first generation. It is, rather, a study narrowly focused on

the clash between the family of high priest Annas and the family of Jesus of Nazareth, a clash inaugurated by a Jeremiah-related prophecy of the temple's doom, uttered by Jesus, and ended by another Jeremiah-related prophecy of the temple's doom, uttered by another man named Jesus. My goal is to draw attention to the importance of this prophecy, what motivated it, and the effects it had on both the followers of Jesus and on the followers of Annas, his family, and allies.

Even as narrowly as I have defined this study, several avenues have not been explored, at least not fully. This is rich, suggestive material. The more I probed, the more questions were raised. My hope is to alert scholars to the importance of a facet in early Christian history that has not been investigated. I begin with an "ambiguous" prophecy, which will provide the context for the prophecies of Jesus and others regarding the fate of Herod's glorious temple. Discussion of this prophecy will create the proper context for the remainder of my study.

### **An Ambiguous Prophecy**

Writing primarily for an elite Roman readership a few years after the destruction of the Jewish temple (in 70 CE), Joseph bar Matthias—better known as Flavius Josephus—discusses a number of incidents that presaged the coming war and catastrophe (66–73 CE). Among these were the appearance of numerous false prophets and charlatans, all of whom promised deliverance (*J.W.* 6.285–88); the appearance of a star over the city of Jerusalem, which many wrongly assumed was a good omen (6.289–91); a cow that gave birth to a lamb, in the very precincts of the temple (6.292); the strange nocturnal self-opening of the massive brass eastern gate of the inner temple court (6.293–96); the appearance of chariots and armed battalions "hurtling through the clouds" (6.297–99); and the loud cry of a host heard one evening during Pentecost, saying, "We are departing from here" (6.300a). Many of these strange omens, leading up to the capture of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Jewish uprising, were also known to Roman writers.

Perhaps related to the star that appeared over the city was a prophecy—or in the words of the politically astute Josephus, "an ambiguous oracle"—which "more than all else incited them to the war." This oracle, found in the Jewish sacred Scriptures, foretold "that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world" (*J.W.* 6.312). Although it is debated, the prophecy most likely in view is that of Numbers 24:17: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come

forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth.” Not only does this prophecy of a “star” cohere with the previously mentioned star that appeared above Jerusalem; the prophecy was also interpreted in royal and messianic terms in Jewish literature of late antiquity. Indeed, when the magi in Matthew’s Gospel inquire after him who has been born “king of the Jews,” because they have seen his star (Matt. 2:1–2), they are probably alluding to Numbers 24:17 (or at least Matthew’s Jewish readers would assume so).<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, the Jewish people assumed that the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 spoke of the coming of a Jewish ruler. The prophecy is quoted in a collection of messianic texts in one of the Qumran Scrolls (see 4Q175 1.9–13). In 1QSB 5.20–29 the prophecy is cited along with Isaiah 11 and is applied to the anticipated “leader of the nation” who will conquer Israel’s enemies. In the great war against the “sons of darkness,” Numbers 24:17 will be fulfilled (1QM 11.5–7). In the *Damascus Document* the text is applied to the coming king and the “interpreter of the Law” (CD 7.18–8:1 [= 4Q266 frag. 3, 3.20–23; 4Q269 frag. 5, lines 3–4]). The Aramaic paraphrases of Jewish Scripture (i.e., the Targumim) regularly paraphrase and interpret Numbers 24:17 as referring to the anticipated royal Messiah: “When the strong king from those of the house of Jacob shall rule, and the Messiah and the strong rod from Israel shall be anointed.” It is rather clear how the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 was understood in Jewish circles in late antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Josephus, however, interpreted the prophecy not in reference to a Jewish redeemer, whether a messiah or something else. Contrary to the Jewish “wise men” of his day, he interpreted it in reference to the victorious Vespasian, the Roman general: “The oracle, however, in reality signified the sovereignty of Vespasian, who was proclaimed emperor on Jewish soil” (*J.W.* 6.313). Vespasian had defeated the Jewish rebels in Galilee, then occupied Jericho and awaited developments in Rome in the aftermath of the suicide of Nero. His patience paid off. After the rapid succession and failures of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, Vespasian was proclaimed emperor. Josephus, who had foretold the accession of Vespasian (*J.W.* 3.401; 4.628–29), was vindicated, at least in the eyes of the Roman elite.<sup>3</sup>

Both Tacitus and Suetonius know of this prophecy and agree with Josephus that it came to fulfillment in Vespasian’s victory and accession to the throne. Tacitus speaks of the prophecy, as well as some of the very omens described by Josephus:

### Messianic Prophecies Known in the Time of Jesus

. . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. . . . (Gen. 49:8–12)

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. (Num. 24:17)

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup>And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. . . . <sup>3</sup>He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. . . . (Isa. 11:1–4)

Prodigies had indeed occurred. . . . Contending hosts were seen meeting in the skies, arms flashed, and suddenly the temple was illuminated with fire from the clouds. Of a sudden the doors of the shrine opened and a superhuman voice cried: "The gods are departing": at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard. Few interpreted these omens as fearful; the majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judaea should possess the world. This mysterious prophecy had in reality pointed to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, as is the way of human ambition, interpreted these great destinies in their own favour, and could not be turned to the truth even by adversity. (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13.1–2)<sup>4</sup>

The variations of language (e.g., the plural "gods" and the reference to Jewish Scripture as "priestly writings") are consistent with that of a polytheistic Gentile who has little familiarity with the religious beliefs of the Jewish people.

Suetonius speaks of a number of different omens that hinted at the rise of Vespasian, but he also mentions the Jewish prophecy and even the prophecy of Josephus himself:

There had spread all over the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome, as afterwards appeared from the event, the people of Judaea took to themselves; accordingly they revolted. . . . When he [Vespasian] consulted the god of Carmel in Judaea, the lots were highly encouraging, promising that what he planned or wished, however great it might be, would come to pass; and one of his high-born prisoners, Josephus by name, as he was being put in chains, declared most confidently that he would soon be released by the same man, who would then, however, be emperor. (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4.5; 5.6)<sup>5</sup>

In view of these statements, especially regarding the Jewish prophecy “spread all over the Orient,” Menahem Stern is justified in saying, “Presumably these Jewish expectations had become a matter of common knowledge by the initial stages of the rebellion, and did not sound strange to a world already familiar with eschatological terminology.”<sup>6</sup>

The prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple reach back anywhere from one generation to a century or more before their fulfillment.<sup>7</sup> A very old prediction of the destruction of the Second Temple is found in the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*. In a section that could date as early as 160 BCE, we are told that God will pull down the “ancient house” and a build a new one, “loftier than the first” (*1 Enoch* 90:28–29). It is possible that “house” here refers to the city of Jerusalem, but a later elaboration in *1 Enoch* suggests that the temple itself is in view: “A temple shall be built for the Great King for ever more” (91:13; 4Q212 4.18).<sup>8</sup>

The book of Tobit, dating to the second century BCE, also seems to anticipate a new temple. On his deathbed Tobit says to his son and grandsons:

But God will again have mercy on them, and bring them back into their land; and they will rebuild the house of God, though it will not be like the former one until the times of the age are completed. After this they will return from the places of their captivity, and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor. And the house of God will be rebuilt

there with a glorious building for all generations for ever, just as the prophets said of it. (Tob. 14:5)

The first part of the verse anticipates the postexilic return to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple, what we call the Second Temple. It is acknowledged that the rebuilt temple “will not be like the former one,” the one built by Solomon. The author of the book of Tobit knows this, of course, for this inferior temple was standing in his own lifetime (see Hag. 2:3). But he writes from the perspective of righteous Tobit, an exile in eighth-century-BCE Assyria. He foresees the inferior Second Temple standing “until the times of the age are completed.” Then all of the Jewish people will return to Israel, and “the house of God will be rebuilt there with a glorious building for all generations for ever.” Clearly this house of God is an eschatological temple that will replace the Second Temple, built soon after the end of the exile.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear that the Second Temple would be destroyed, but the anticipation that it will be replaced is quite clear.

A prophecy of the temple’s destruction is found in the *Testament of Levi*. In this pseudepigraphal work (ca. 100 BCE) the aged patriarch Levi is portrayed on his deathbed, giving his final testament to his sons. He tells them, “At the end of the ages you will transgress against the Lord” (14:1). The description of priestly wickedness that follows matches the complaints that we find in the literature leading up to the time of Jesus, as seen in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls (mostly dating to the first century BCE) and in the *Testament of Moses* (dating ca. 25–30 CE). Priestly wickedness will result in the destruction of the temple: “Therefore the temple, which the Lord shall choose, shall be laid waste through your uncleanness, and you shall be captives through throughout all nations. . . . All who hate you will rejoice at your destruction” (*T. Levi* 15:1, 3).

Although Christian editing is present elsewhere in the *Testament of Levi* (e.g., at 10:3; 14:2; and 16:3, 5), the prophecy of the temple’s destruction in chapter 15 is probably genuine.<sup>10</sup> There is nothing in the prophecy that reflects knowledge of the temple’s destruction in 70 CE (e.g., no mention of siege or fire), whereas the anticipation that the priesthood will be hated by the Gentiles stands somewhat in tension with what actually happened. After all, the ruling priesthood was for the most part collaborating with Rome; the Jewish rebels attacked and killed some of the ruling priests, including the high priest himself; and Josephus, also of aristocratic lineage, became a close friend and confidant of the Flavian family. If anything, the dispersion foretold in 16:5 is based on the earlier Babylonian sack of Jerusalem, not on the Roman capture of the city.



The fictional patriarch Judah also predicts the destruction of Jerusalem's temple, again due to the wickedness of Israel's leadership. Many evils will befall Israel, including "consumption of God's sanctuary by fire" (*T. Judah* 23:3). In this case the prediction could be a Christian gloss and not a genuine predestruction prediction.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the Qumran scrolls show evidence of anticipating the temple's destruction. In reference to the corrupt high priesthood, the *Commentary on Habakkuk* (*Pesher Habakkuk*) asserts that "in the last days their riches and plunder alike will be handed over to the army of the Kittim" (1QpHab 9.6–7). Most scholars understand the "Kittim" as a reference either to the Greeks or to the Romans. Later the commentary adds that "God will condemn" the high priest of the last days to "utter destruction" (12.5). The destruction of the high priest does not, of course, necessarily imply the destruction of the temple itself.

The commentary on Nahum reviews some of Israel's intertestamental history, explaining that Nahum 2:11b ("Wherever the lion goes to enter, there also goes the whelp without fear") refers to "Demetrius, king of Greece, who sought to enter Jerusalem through the counsel of the Flattery-Seekers; [but it never fell into the] power of the kings of Greece from Antiochus until the appearance of the rulers of the Kittim; but afterward it will be trampled [by the Gentiles . . .] (4QpNah frags. 3–4, 1.1–4, with restorations).<sup>12</sup> The expected trampling of Jerusalem may well have included an assault on the temple itself, perhaps even its destruction. Destruction or defilement of the temple would be consistent with an expectation that the temple of the last days will be created anew by God, as we find expressed in the *Temple Scroll*: "I shall sanctify my temple with my glory, for I will cause my glory to dwell upon it until the day of creation, when I myself will create my temple; I will establish it for myself for ever in fulfillment of the covenant that I made with Jacob at Bethel. . . ." (11Q19 29.8–10).

An eschatological temple seems to be in view in another scroll from Qumran:

This "place" is the house that [they shall build for him] in the last days, as it is written in the book of <sup>3</sup>[Moses: "A temple of] the Lord are you to prepare with your hands; the Lord will reign forever and ever" [Exod. 15:17]. This passage describes the temple that no [man with a] permanent [fleshly defect] shall enter, <sup>4</sup>nor Ammonite, Moabite, bastard, foreigner, or alien, forevermore. Surely his holiness <sup>5</sup>shall be rev[ea]led there; eternal glory shall ever be apparent

there. Strangers shall not again defile it, as they formerly defiled  
 6the temp[le of I]srael through their sins. (4Q174 1.2–6, with  
 restorations)

Several Qumran scrolls speak of a “new Jerusalem” (e.g., 1Q32, 2Q24, 4Q554, 4Q555, 5Q15, 11Q18), though whether a new temple is also envisioned is not clear. In these fragmentary texts the temple is mentioned only a few times (e.g., 4Q554 frag. 1, 1.4; 2.18). The New Testament’s book of Revelation also speaks of a “new Jerusalem,” which comes down from heaven, along with a “tabernacle of God” (Rev. 21:2–3). Is this “tabernacle” or “dwelling” (Greek: *skēnē*), which probably alludes to Ezekiel 37:27 (“My dwelling place [Greek: *kataskēnōsis*] shall be with them”), the equivalent of a new temple? In a sense, it probably is. However, it is probably better to say that the very presence of God in the new Jerusalem renders a temple building unnecessary. Of course, when the book of Revelation was composed (near the end of the first century CE), Jerusalem’s famous temple had been long destroyed. All that is prophetic in Revelation is the anticipation of a new Jerusalem and the very presence of God.

First-century texts and individuals foretold the coming doom of the temple. The *Lives of Prophets*, probably pre-70 CE,<sup>13</sup> contains two prophecies of the destruction of the first-century Temple:

And he [Jonah] gave a portent concerning Jerusalem and the whole land, that whenever they should see a stone crying out piteously, the end was at hand. And whenever they should see all the Gentiles in Jerusalem, the entire city would be razed to the ground. (*Life of Jonah* 10:10–11)

And concerning the end of the temple, he [Habakkuk] predicted, “By a western nation it will happen.” “At that time,” he said, “the curtain of the Dabeir [i.e., the Holy of Holies] will be torn into small pieces, and the capitals of the two pillars will be taken away, and no one will know where they are; and they will be carried away by angels into the wilderness, where the Tent of Witness was set up in the beginning.” (*Life of Habakkuk* 12:11)<sup>14</sup>

These prophecies are probably not based upon the events of 70 CE. In reference to the prophecy credited to Jonah, Douglas Hare thinks that rather than pointing to the Romans specifically, the prophecy seems “to

reflect uneasiness regarding the increasing number of Gentile visitors and/or residents, which threatened to change the character of Israel's holy city." Hare adds that the "prophecy of 10:11 is best taken as reflecting an earlier situation, not the bitter experience" of 70 CE. In reference to Habakkuk's prophecy of the temple's destruction at the hands of a "western nation," Hare similarly concludes that the "prediction of [*Lives*] 12:11 that the temple will be destroyed by a Western nation was probably understood as referring to the Romans, but nothing requires that it be taken as a prophecy after the fact; the accompanying statements have the ring of unfulfilled predictions."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth is well known for his predictions of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of its famous temple:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! <sup>35</sup>Behold, your house is forsaken. (Luke 13:34–35)

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, <sup>42</sup>saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup>and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41–44)

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." (Mark 13:1–2)

Other texts could be cited (e.g., Mark 14:58; Luke 21:20–24; 23:27–31). Of special importance was Jesus' appeal to Jeremiah 7:11 ("den of robbers") on the occasion of his demonstration in the temple precincts (Mark 11:15–18). Jeremiah 7 constitutes sharp criticism of the ruling priests of the First Temple and a warning that destruction is at hand. (More will be said about this later.) Today scholars are inclined to think that Jesus did actually warn of coming judgment upon Jerusalem and

the temple. Jesus' demonstration in the temple's precincts, along with a prophecy or two that the temple would be destroyed, easily explains the actions taken against him by the ruling priests. It also explains the charge that Jesus had been heard threatening the temple (Mark 14:58), a tradition that resists dating to a post-Easter setting.

Probably the weightiest factor in favor of the authenticity of the prophecies is the observation that they do not reflect specific details of the destruction of the temple. There is no mention of the devastating fire that swept the precincts and was much emphasized in the graphic description narrated by Josephus (*J.W.* 6.165–68, 177–85, 190–92, 228–35, 250–84, 316, 346, 353–55, 407, 434). Almost poetically, Josephus says, “You would indeed have thought that the Temple Mount was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame” (*J.W.* 6.275). And Jesus' admonition to pray that the destruction “not happen in winter” (see Mark 13:18) would be irrelevant and curious in light of the fact that the city was captured and the temple burned in August and September.<sup>16</sup>

Josephus himself also claims to have predicted the destruction of the temple and the defeat of the Jewish rebels:

But as . . . Josephus overheard the threats of the hostile crowd, suddenly there came back into his mind those nightly dreams, in which God had foretold to him the impending fate of the Jews and the destinies of the Roman sovereigns. . . . He was not ignorant of the prophecies in the sacred books. (*J.W.* 3.351–52)

This prophecy clarifies Josephus's occasional fatalistic statements: “That building, however, God, indeed long since, had sentenced to the flames” (*J.W.* 6.250). But what “prophecies in the sacred books” did Josephus have in mind? He relates two of them, albeit in very cryptic terms:

Who does not know the records of the ancient prophets and that oracle which threatens this poor city and is even now coming true? For they foretold that it would then be taken whenever one should begin to slaughter his own countrymen. (*J.W.* 6.109)

Thus the Jews, after the demolition of Antonia, reduced the temple to a square, although they had it recorded in their oracles that the city and the sanctuary would be taken when the temple should become foursquare. (*J.W.* 6.311)

What prophecies Josephus had in mind is difficult to decide. He may have seen in prophecies that originally concerned the destruction of First Temple further prophecies for the temple of his own day. We actually have an example of this in the remarkable activity of one Jesus, son of Ananias, who for seven and a half years proclaimed the doom of Jerusalem and its temple. According to Josephus:

Four years before the war . . . one Jesus, son of Ananias, . . . standing in the temple, suddenly began to cry out:

“A voice from the east,  
 A voice from the west,  
 A voice from the four winds,  
 A voice against Jerusalem and the Sanctuary,  
 A voice against the bridegroom and the bride,  
 A voice against all people.” (*J.W.* 6.301)  
 “Woe to Jerusalem!” (*J.W.* 6.306)  
 “Woe once more to the city and to the people and to the  
 Sanctuary, . . .  
 and woe to me also” (*J.W.* 6.309)

We again hear an allusion to Jeremiah 7, this time to verse 34 (“I will make to cease . . . the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. . .”). As in the earlier demonstration by Jesus of Nazareth, the allusion to Jeremiah was rightly understood as a threat against the temple. Josephus tells us that the Jesus of his time, a “rude peasant,” was arrested by leading citizens and severely beaten. When he continued to cry out as before, he was taken before the Roman governor, Albinus, who had him “flayed to the bone with scourges” (*J.W.* 6.302–4). The governor decided that the man was a maniac, and so he released him (6.305). Jesus continued to proclaim his foreboding oracle until he was killed by a siege stone catapulted over the city wall (6.309). Later I will give more about this interesting character and what motivated him.

In not especially early rabbinic tradition we are told that at least two early rabbis predicted the destruction of the Herodian Temple:

Forty years before the destruction of the temple the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide

open. Said Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to the Temple, “O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, ‘Open you doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars!’ [Zech. 11:1].” (y. *Sotab* 6.3; cf. b. *Yoma* 39b; *Lam. Rab.* 1:5 §31)

Rabbi Zadok observed fasts for forty years in order that Jerusalem might not be destroyed, [and he became so thin that] when he ate anything the food could be seen [as it passed down his throat]. (b. *Gittin* 56a)

Zadok, Yohanan ben Zakkai, and other rabbis, we are told, tried to persuade the rebels to surrender to the Romans. Nearly murdered for his failure to support the rebellion, Yohanan finally escaped the city, being carried out in a coffin (*Lam. Rab.* 1:5 §31; b. *Git.* 56a–b; *’Abot R. Nat.* [A] 4:5). According to the tradition in *Lamentations Rabbah*, Zadok’s life was spared at Yohanan’s request. How much (if any) of this is historical is hard to say.

Examination of these traditions and oracles that speak of the coming destruction of the Herodian Temple reveals that they are almost always based upon the language and oracles of the classical prophets of the Old Testament. This observation also applies to the predictions of Jesus. Virtually every phrase reflects the language and imagery of the prophets who spoke of the destruction of the Solomonic Temple. Indeed, the destruction of the First Temple seems to have laid the groundwork for the emergence of a typology, which at times could be exploited by critics of the temple establishment.

Review of these traditions leads me to the following four conclusions:

1. As did many others, Jesus of Nazareth predicted the destruction of the Herodian Temple. This tradition is well attested and is corroborated in a variety of ways in the New Testament Gospels.

2. As did many others, Jesus employed the language of the classical prophets, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel, whose oracles were concerned with the Babylonian destruction of the Solomonic Temple, in predicting the Herodian Temple’s destruction. Moreover, Jesus even alluded to some of the same complaints voiced by the prophets of old (e.g., Jer. 7:11).

3. There is substantial evidence of corruption in the Herodian Temple establishment. Furthermore, there is evidence of sectarian and peasant resentment toward the ruling establishment (i.e., ruling priests, Roman

authorities). Jesus' action in the temple (the so-called "cleansing") was in all probability related to, and indeed possibly the occasion for, a prophetic word against the temple.<sup>17</sup>

4. The fact that the first-century temple was constructed by Herod may have been a factor in anticipating its destruction. Built by Herod and administered by corrupt non-Zadokite ruling priestly families, the temple—in the minds of some—faced certain destruction.

We may be skeptical of some of these prophecies and suspect them of being little more than *vaticinia ex eventu* ("prophecies from the event"), but to classify all of them this way strikes me as special pleading. There are simply too many of them, and most of them show no knowledge of what actually happened in the summer of 70 CE. We are encouraged to accept them as genuine, for the details of the prophecies simply do not match well the details of the actual event.

### A Family Feud

What we have is a generation, of approximately forty years, of competition between the family of Jesus on the one hand, and the family of Annas and their aristocratic allies on the other hand. This tumultuous history begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in the year 30 (or perhaps 33) CE. After sharply criticizing the temple establishment, Jesus is himself confronted by the establishment. Before the week concludes, Jesus is brought before Annas, former high priest, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, current high priest (Matt. 26:57; John 18:13–14, 24, 28; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63–64, "the first men among us"). Jesus is condemned and sent to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, who orders Jesus' death by crucifixion.

The Easter event transformed the remnants of the movement into what became the church. The principal disciples of Jesus began proclaiming the good news of the resurrection of Jesus and soon encountered aggressive opposition from the ruling priests (Acts 4:1–4). Peter and others are brought before the Jewish rulers, among them "Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family" (Acts 4:6). Here once again high priest (emeritus) Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas, current high priest, confront the Jesus movement. With them is a priest called "John" (or "Jonathan"), one of the sons of Annas, who in 37 CE served as high priest briefly after Caiaphas was deposed (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.95). The ruling priests order Peter and his colleagues to cease speaking of Jesus, but they remain defiant (Acts 4:14–22). They continue to preach, and the church continues to grow.

### High Priest Annas and His Family

Annas son of Seth (6–15 CE)

Eleazar son of Annas (16–17 CE)

Joseph, called Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas (18–37 CE)

Jonathan son of Annas (37 CE)

Theophilus son of Annas (37–41 CE)

Matthias son of Annas (?)

Annas son of Annas (62 CE)

(See Luke 3:2; John 18:13–14; Acts 4:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.26, 33–35, 95; 20.197–200.)

The opposition to the church, however, also continues. Not long after the council (Sanhedrin) had warned Peter, the deacon-turned-evangelist Stephen suffers martyrdom. Criticized by members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Acts 6:9), Stephen is brought before the council (6:12–15), which includes “the high priest” (7:1), who can only be Caiaphas. Stephen is stoned to death (7:58–60). After the brief administration of Jonathan, son of Annas, another son of Annas named Theophilus is appointed to the high priesthood in 37 CE. At the beginning of his administration, Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, acquired the tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanius. After the death of Caligula in 41 CE, Emperor Claudius appointed Agrippa I over the whole of Israel as “king of the Jews.” It was during his reign, perhaps influenced by Theophilus and his family, that Agrippa I puts to death James the son of Zebedee and arrests Peter (Acts 12:1–5). After his escape from prison, Peter removes himself from Jerusalem, and James the brother of Jesus becomes the leader of the church (12:17).

James manages to remain alive and active in Jerusalem for about twenty years. But with the sudden death of the Roman governor Festus, recently appointed Annas (or Ananus), son of Annas, seized the opportunity to have James and some others (likely Christians) put to death by stoning. When Albinus the new governor arrived, he removed Annas (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.197–203). What happens next is very interesting. Not long after the death of James and arrival of Albinus, one Jesus ben Ananias entered Jerusalem (perhaps in 63 CE) and began uttering an oracle of woe based on Jeremiah 7. Not surprisingly, the ruling priests were outraged, wanted the man put to death, and no doubt would have killed him had it not been



for the Roman governor. Albinus interrogated the man, whipped him, and then released him (Josephus, *J.W.* 6.300–309).

One must wonder if Jesus ben Ananias was a Christian prophet who took up his oracle in protest against the killing of James and, like Jesus of Nazareth some thirty years earlier, applied the grim Jeremiah 7 to his aristocratic priestly contemporaries. In any event, Josephus tells us that this man proclaimed the doom of the city and sanctuary for seven years and then died during the siege in the summer of 70 CE. With the death of Jesus ben Ananias, the capture of the city of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple, the first generation of the church came to a sudden and violent conclusion. It was a generation that began and ended amid conflict with the ruling priests. It was a conflict that began and ended amid prophecies inspired by Jeremiah 7.

In the remainder of this book, I want to follow this interesting thread, fleshing out various components along the way. My treatment is admittedly quite selective; a number of important issues are passed over. My goal is to explore more fully the dynamics of the conflict between Jesus and his followers on the one hand, and Annas and his followers on the other hand. I believe that better understanding of these dynamics will help us understand better the history and achievement of the Christian church in Jerusalem in that crucial first generation.

I bring this introduction to a close with a quick preview of the chapters that follow. In chapter 1 I ask a fundamental question: Did Jesus intend to found the Christian church? The general public would probably answer in the affirmative; most biblical scholars and historians would answer in the negative. Apart from careful qualification, neither answer is correct. There can be little doubt that Jesus envisioned the creation of a community or society, but it is most unlikely that he envisioned something outside of or over against Israel itself. So what exactly then did Jesus envision? The answer to this question will help us understand the dynamics of the first generation of his movement, including its relationship to the temple establishment.

Chapter 2 inquires into Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and asks in what way, if at all, the "kingdom of God" relates to the Christian church. We shall find that Jesus' concept of the kingdom is deeply rooted in Israel's ancient Scripture, especially in the book of Isaiah. The coming kingdom of God brings to an end the human kingdoms of oppression and injustice. That Israel's Gentile oppressors face judgment is indeed good news for Israel, but in Jesus' conception of the kingdom, even Israel itself is subject to a critical review. Jesus will challenge assumptions of election,

warning that even the “sons of the kingdom” face judgment unless they repent. Jesus knows too that this message of judgment will eventuate in his death and that through his death a repentant remnant, his community or church, will be established. In his teaching and example are hints that this remnant will include Gentiles.

Chapter 3 looks at the role of James the brother of Jesus as leader of the new movement in Jerusalem. A number of questions will be explored, such as why James, who was not one of his brother’s original disciples, rose to such prominence in the church; how it was that James could remain in Jerusalem, when Peter found it necessary to flee; and how James related to Paul—according to their letters and according to the book of Acts—and in what ways they may have differed over “works of the law.”

Chapter 4, which more or less serves as an excursus, explores further the apparent tension between Paul and James on the matter of law and works. At the heart of this debate is the question of why “works” are in view in these respective authorities. We will examine the zealot model, typified by the priest Phinehas; the teaching on works of law found in the *Halakic Letter* from Qumran (4QMMT = 4Q394–99); and the dominical commandment to love one’s neighbor as one’s self.

Chapter 5 examines the conflict between the families and followers of Jesus and Annas the high priest. This conflict is traced from the initial encounter between Jesus and Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, onward to the murder of James, the brother of Jesus, at the hands of Annas, son of Annas the elder. Here I will also suggest that the “rude peasant,” one Jesus ben Ananias, who warned of approaching judgment, was a member of the Jesus movement and rose up in protest of the murder of James. With the death of ben Ananias and the destruction of the temple, the first generation of the Jesus movement comes to an end.

The book could have concluded with chapter 5. But I believe it is important to examine the post-70-CE period in order to gain a better perspective of the problems and trends that emerged in the first generation and came to fuller expression in following generations. Accordingly, chapter 6 traces the aftermath of the Jewish rebellion, an aftermath that saw the church move away from its Jewish roots and Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. I look at the growing estrangement between the followers of Jesus and the synagogue, as we see it in Matthew, John, Revelation, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr. The chapter concludes with the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE) and the bitter polemic between Jews and Christians that ensued.

I have also added an appendix that further explores the factors—both historical and theological—that led to the rift between the Jesus movement and the synagogue. I hope to clarify what it really was that drove the wedge between the Jewish community that had reservations about the messianic credentials of Jesus and the Jesus community, which in its first century or so held in very high regard the Scriptures of Israel and the heritage of the Jewish people.