July/August 1994
Number 45

מנקודת ראות ירושלמית

Jerusalem Perspective

Exploring the Jewish Background to the Life and Words of Jesus

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Readers' Perspective

An Answer to Prayer

I look forward, with great anticipation, to reading all your society is discovering about the life and times of Jesus. I have long searched for a source that could educate me regarding Jesus' actual meaning, in Hebrew, of his words. Organizational Christianity has taken too literal a view, in my opinion, of God's Word, and, it seems closed to new information that might destroy the dogma they have accepted. I am a "born again" Christian and have been seeking to understand Jesus as a teacher. I have read a few back issues given to me by a friend that have made me hungry for more information. It seems the LORD has answered my prayers by leading me to *Jerusalem Perspective*.

Jim DeSantis, Fairview,
Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary Preview

Thank you very much for the very interesting issue of *JP* (May/Aug. 1993). I really did enjoy reading and comparing the *Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary* preview. Even though I don't agree with Dr. R. Lindsey's theory of reconstruction of the Gospels (It is probably hard to find two theologians who would agree in all the details within this complex question...), and therefore of course don't always follow the reasoning of the interpretations, I find this commentary, as it is presented in *JP*'s preview, great! I have just two questions about it: When are you planing to release the "several hundred pages" of this commentary? Will an ordinary citizen like me be able to afford it? I am working with Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics in Papua New Guinea, and I am sure this commentary would be of great value for me in translating the Gospels. I am looking forward to those volume(s).

Thomas Weber, Ukarumpa via Lae,
Papua New Guinea

We too have waited many years for publication of the Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary. *Given our present financial resources, the realization of this goal is not possible. For the present, members of the Jerusalem School content themselves with publishing "pieces" of the commentary in* Jerusalem Perspective, *and in their individual articles and books. The commentary we envision will be composed of ten to fifteen volumes. Each volume would be available separately, and would therefore be modestly priced.* **– Ed.**

Cover photo: Bedouins of the Atawne tribe (in Israel's Negev) drinking coffee outside their tent. The Bedouins are noted for their hospitality.
(Israel Government Press Office)

Jerusalem Perspective

JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE is an independent bimonthly report on current Gospel research. It features the work of Jewish and Christian scholars, particularly the scholars of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.

Subscriptions

One year (6 issues): US$36 – £24 – NIS90.

Two years (12 issues): US$60 – £40 – NIS150.

Back issues — Issues 1–20 (Oct. 1987–May 1989; monthly, four-page issues) are US$2 – £1.50 – NIS5 each. Issues 21 (Jul./Aug. 1989) and following (bimonthly, sixteen-page issues) are US$5 – £3.50 – NIS12.50 each.

JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE accepts payment in the following currencies: Israeli shekel; pound sterling; United States, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand dollar; French, Swiss or Belgian franc; Norwegian or Danish krone; Swedish krona; Dutch florin; Austrian schilling; German mark; Finish markka. Prices in Israeli shekels apply to delivery in Israel only.

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JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE is indexed in *New Testament Abstracts, Religious and Theological Abstracts, Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus* and *Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete.*

Printed in Israel. ISSN 0792-1357

Plates: Tafsar L., Jerusalem

Printing: Sabinsky, Tel-Aviv

Articles published in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE express the views of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or other members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.

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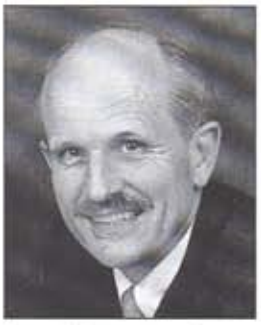
Jesus' Attitude Toward Pacifism

The idea that Jesus taught pacifism arose primarily due to the misunderstanding of a number of his sayings. When viewed from a Jewish perspective, the Gospel passages on which pacifism is based point to quite a different conclusion.



David Bivin is editor and publisher of Jerusalem Perspective, *and director of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.*

by David Bivin

Many people over the years have seen Jesus as a pacifist—and for good reason. Here was a man who apparently was willing to die rather than defend himself, a man who taught his disciples not to kill, not to resist evil, to love their enemies, not to fear those who kill the body, and that only those who are willing to lose their lives will be able to save them.[1] Jesus' teachings seem very much like those of such popular pacifists as Tolstoy and Gandhi, and indeed Tolstoy based his views on Gospel passages.[2]

But did Jesus teach that it is wrong to defend oneself against attack? Did he really mean that we should not resist evil? Such a view seems to contradict what we read elsewhere in the Bible. In Romans 12:9, for example, Paul says that one should "hate what is evil," and in James 4:7 we read that we are to "resist the devil." It is clear from passages in Luke 22 that Jesus' disciples were armed,[3] and Jesus himself advised them to purchase swords.[4]

These apparent contradictions may be reconciled by recognizing the Hebraic nuances of the Gospel texts, and by developing a deeper understanding of the Jewish background to Jesus' words.

Killing or Murder

One verse that is commonly cited in support of Jesus' pacifism is Matthew 5:21, which most English versions of the Bible render, "You shall not kill." The Greek word translated "kill" in this passage is a form of the verb φονεύω (*phoneuō*). This was always used as the equivalent of the Hebrew verb רָצַח (*ra·TSAH*) in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. *Ra·TSAH* is the word used in the sixth commandment in both Exodus 20:13 and its parallel, Deuteronomy 5:17. It seems quite certain that in Matthew 5:21 Jesus was quoting the sixth commandment.

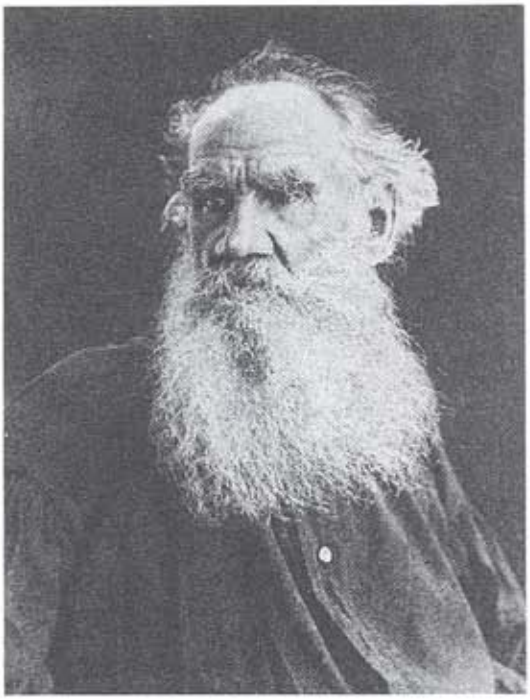
The words *phoneuō* and *ra·TSAH* are both ambiguous and can mean either "kill" or "murder," depending upon the context. However, God himself commanded capital punishment for such crimes as deliberate murder (Exod. 21:12–15), rape (Deut. 22:25–26), kidnapping (Exod. 21:16), adultery (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22), sorcery (Exod. 22:18), and many other crimes. The sixth commandment, therefore, must be a prohibition against murder, not killing as such.

In spite of this, the *King James Version* of 1611, and the revisions of 1885 (*Revised Version*) and 1952 (*Revised Standard Version*), used "kill" rather than "murder" in translating Jesus' quotation of this commandment.[5] Although most recent translations of the Bible have corrected this mistake,[6] the "kill" of the *King James Version* and its successors has strongly influenced many English-speaking Christians' views of self-defense.

Hebrew Maxim

Another saying of Jesus on which his supposed pacifism is based is found in Matthew 5:39a. It is usually translated, "Do not resist evil," or "Do not resist one who is evil." However, when Jesus' saying is translated back into Hebrew, it is seen to be a quotation of a well-known Hebrew proverb that appears with slight variations in Psalms 37:1, 8 and Proverbs 24:19.[7]

This Hebrew maxim is usually translated, "Do not fret because of evildoers," or, "Do not be vexed by evildoers." Bible translators apparently have supposed from the contexts of this maxim in Psalm 37 and



Count Leo Tolstoy.
(The Bettmann Archive)

Proverbs 24 which emphasize that evildoers will be destroyed, that the righteous should not be concerned about evildoers or pay them any attention. This supposition is strengthened by the second half of Psalms 37:1 which, as it is usually translated, advises that one should not be envious of such evildoers. It thus appears that the verb translated "fret" or "be vexed" is correctly translated. However, elsewhere in the Bible this verb always seems to have some sense of the meaning "anger."[8] Furthermore, the two parallels to this verb in Psalms 37:8, both synonyms for anger, suggest that the verb in Matthew 5 must also have that meaning.

The verb in question is from the root ח-ר-ה (*h-r-h*) whose basic meaning is "burn." From this root meaning is derived "anger," a sense that all Hebrew words from this root have in common. (Note that in English also, many verbs expressing anger have something to do with fire or burning—be hot, burn, boil, flare up.) In some occurrences of this root, anger is a result of jealousy or rivalry. Saul's jealousy of David caused him to fly into a rage (1 Sam. 20:7, 30). This nuance of *h-r-h* is also reflected in the use of "contend" in Isaiah 41:11 in *The Holy Scriptures*, the translation published by the Jewish Publication Society of America: "Shamed and chagrined shall be all who contend with you."

The particular form of the verb used in our proverb is a form for intensive action and thus expresses a passionate anger. This furious anger leads to a response in kind. Such anger results in a rivalry to see who can get the better of the other, and in each round of the competition the level of anger and violence rises. This amounts to responding to evil on its own terms, to competing with those who wrong us in doing wrong.

The *New English Bible*'s translation of Psalms 37:1 and 8 is unique: "Do not strive to outdo the evildoers or emulate those who do wrong. For like grass they soon wither and fade like the green of spring"; "Be angry no more, have done with wrath; strive not to outdo in evildoing." This seems to be the only version of the Bible that reflects the Hebrew "anger" verb's nuance of rivalry or competition.

Likewise, the *Good News Bible* is apparently the only translation of the New Testament that uses "revenge" or anything similar to render Matthew 5:38–39: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who does you wrong. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too." It is surprising there are not other versions that translate in the same way. Following "But I tell you," the context demands "Do not take revenge," since the first part of verse 39 speaks of "an eye for an eye," in other words, punishment that is a response in kind.

In idiomatic English, Matthew 5:39a might read simply, "Don't try to get even with evildoers."[9] Not "competing" with evildoers is very different from not resisting evildoers. Jesus was not teaching that one should submit to evil, but that one should not seek revenge. As Proverbs 24:29 says, "Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done.'" Jesus' statement has nothing to do with confronting a murderer or facing an enemy on the field of battle.

Mistranslation of Matthew 5:39a has created a theological contradiction, but when Jesus' saying is correctly understood, it harmonizes beautifully with other New Testament passages: "See that none of you pays back evil with evil; instead, always try to do good to each other and to all people" (1 Thess. 5:15); "Do not repay evil with evil or curses with curses, but with blessings. Bless in return—that is what you have been called to do—so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9); "Bless those who persecute you. Bless them, do not curse them. Do not pay anyone back with evil for evil.... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone. Beloved, do not take revenge, but leave that to the wrath of God" (Rom. 12:14,17–19); or, as Jesus commanded, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44).

Resist Evil

Our response to evil *does* have to be resistance—it is morally wrong to tolerate

evil. However, we also must continue to show love for the evildoer.

It should be noted that loving and praying for one's enemies in no way precludes defending oneself when one's life is in danger. One is morally obligated to preserve life, including one's own. Jesus never taught that it is wrong to defend oneself against life-threatening attack. However, he consistently taught his disciples to forgive and not to seek revenge against those who had attacked them. As Proverbs 20:22 counsels, "Do not say, 'I will repay the evil deed in kind.' Trust in the Lord. He will take care of it." Our responsibility is not to respond in kind to belligerence directed against us. That only prolongs and perpetuates the evil. We are not to "be overcome by evil," but to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

Not only does a pacifistic interpretation of Jesus' sayings contradict many biblical passages, but pacifism was never a part of Jewish belief. According to Scripture, for example, a person who kills a housebreaker at night is not guilty of murder: "If a thief is seized while tunneling [to break into a house], and he is beaten to death, the person who killed him is not guilty of bloodshed" (Exod. 22:2). The rationale is that the thief is ready to murder anyone who surprises him, thus one may preempt the thief.

The Jewish position on this issue is summed up in the rabbinic dictum, "If someone comes to murder you, anticipate him and kill him first."[10] The sages taught that if one is in danger of being murdered, he should defend himself, even if there is a measure of doubt about the intention of the attacker. Furthermore, if another person's life is threatened, one is obligated to prevent that murder, if necessary by killing the attacker. The rabbis ruled that a person who is pursuing someone else with intent to murder may be killed.[11] In light of this, it is very unlikely that Jesus, a Jew of the first century, would have espoused pacifism.

When we examine Jesus' words from a Hebraic-Jewish perspective, we can see what has been obscured by mistranslation and lack of familiarity with Judaism. The passages construed to support pacifism

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, disciple of Tolstoy. *(Margaret Bourke-White, LIFE Magazine, © TIME, Inc.)*

actually condemn revenge rather than self-defense. It is not surprising that this interpretation is consistent with Jesus' other teachings and the rest of biblical instruction. JP

1. Matthew 5:21; 5:39a; 5:44; 10:28; 16:25.

2. See Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is within You*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York, 1894; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). In 1894 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, at that time a barrister in South Africa, read *The Kingdom of God Is within You* which had been loaned to him by a Quaker. The book "overwhelmed" him, he wrote in his autobiography. In 1906 Gandhi, struggling against racial prejudice in South Africa, launched a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience. In 1910 he founded Tolstoy Farm for the families of men who were jailed in the struggle. Later, in India, Gandhi founded other such communities based on Tolstoy's ideology. In 1920 he proclaimed his program of nonviolent noncooperation with the British rulers of India that led to freedom from British rule.

3. Luke 22:38, 49.

4. Luke 22:36.

5. In addition to the *King James Version* and its revisions, such versions as the *New Jerusalem Bible*, *The Living Bible* and *The Amplified Bible* render Matthew 5:21 as "kill." However, *The Living Bible* and *The Amplified Bible* show inconsistency by translating the sixth commandment using "murder."

6. Rendering Matthew 5:21 by "murder" or "commit murder" are the *New English Bible*, *New International Version*, *New American Standard Bible*, *New American Bible*, *Good News Bible*, *New Berkeley Version* and the New Testament translations of Goodspeed, Moffatt, Phillips, Stern (*Jewish New Testament*) and Weymouth.

7. I am indebted to Robert L. Lindsey for drawing my attention to the connection between Matthew 5:39a and these three passages. Psalms 37:1 and Proverbs 24:19 read אַל תִּתְחַר בִּמְרֵעִים (*ʾal tit·HAR ba·me·re·ʿIM*, Do not be furiously angry with evildoers). Psalms 37:8 reads אַל תִּתְחַר אַךְ לְהָרַע (*ʾal tit·HAR ʾaḵ le·ha·RE·aʿ*, Do not be furiously angry; it can only do harm).

8. See the entry חָרָה (*ḥa·RAH*) in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 5:171–176.

9. "Wrongdoers" might be preferable to "evildoers." As the context, which mentions insults and lawsuits, shows, Jesus probably was not speaking primarily of confrontations with criminals or enemies on the field of battle, but of confrontations with ordinary acquaintances who have committed an offense.

10. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 72[a].

11. Mishnah, Sanhedrin 8:7.

Martin Luther King, Jr., disciple of Gandhi. *(Julian Wasser)*

Hospitality: Heritage of the Church

Hospitality, charity and visiting the sick were priorities in the teaching of Jesus and other sages of his day. In the following article, Dr. Wilson highlights for Christians the importance of hospitality.

Marvin R. Wilson is the Harold J. Ockenga Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.

by Marvin Wilson

Hospitality was a fundamental function of the Jewish home in the time of Jesus. This practice is also central in the Hebraic heritage of the Church. Schooled in a rich rabbinic background, Paul inculcates this teaching in his readers. He instructs the church at Rome to "practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). Here Paul reflects a sacred duty that was present in Jewish life from the earliest times.

The Stranger

Biblical law specified that it was an obligation to extend hospitality and love to the גֵּר (*ger*), "alien" or "stranger," for the Hebrew people themselves once were "aliens (*ge·RIM*) in Egypt" (Lev. 19:34). Isaiah states that a genuinely righteous person will heed the obligation to "share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter" (Isa. 58:7). In his personal statement of ethical vindication, Job claims, "No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler" (Job 31:32).

The term used in rabbinic literature for hospitality is הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים (*hak·na·SAT ʾor·HIM*), literally, "bringing in of guests" or "gathering in of travelers."* Rabbinic literature provides considerable insight into the practice of *hak·na·SAT ʾor·HIM*, the very term used in Romans 12:13 in Franz Delitzsch's classic Hebrew New Testament translation.

Open to All

The rabbis considered hospitality one of the most important functions of the home:

"Great is hospitality; greater even than early attendance at the house of study or than receiving the Shechinah" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127[a]). Indeed, hospitality is listed first among six virtues, "the fruit of which man eats in this world" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127[a]).

One was not to discriminate in the showing of hospitality. Whereas some people entertain only the rich, or people from a certain social or racial status, the rabbis taught that the home was to be open to all classes and kinds of people.

There was a custom in Jerusalem to place a napkin over the doorway. "Whenever the napkin was spread, guests (travelers) could enter" (Tosefta, Berachot 4:9). Another practice in Jerusalem was to display a flag to show that a meal was in progress (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 93[b]). The rabbis also stated, "Let your house be open wide, and let the poor be members of your household" (Mishnah, Avot 1:5). It was said of Rav Huna (fourth-century A.D. Babylonian sage) that "when he used to sit down to a meal, he opened the doors and exclaimed, 'Let whoever is in need enter and eat'" (Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 20[b]).

Children were taught to be hospitable. They were instructed when answering the door to invite guests to enter and to dine with the family. "Teach your household humility—so that if a poor man stands at the door and asks: 'Is your father in?' they will respond: 'Yes, come in.' As soon as the poor man enters, let the table be set for him" (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 7).

Sacred Obligation

Guests were to be received graciously and cheerfully. Whereas many Westerners today avoid hospitality altogether, begrudg-

ingly endure it or tolerate it as a necessary evil, Middle Easterners have always considered hospitality as a sacred obligation to be done with cheer. Rabbinic literature particularly emphasizes this obligation: "Let your house be wide open to guests. Receive people graciously. Lavish hospitality accompanied by a sour disposition means far less than modest hospitality that is extended cheerfully" (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 1).

Guests had a responsibility to the host. Some food was expected to be left on the plate (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 53[b]). They were not to take advantage of the host's kindness, but to be grateful (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 58[a]) and offer a special prayer for the host at the conclusion of the meal (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 46[a]). In addition, guests were not to ruffle the host or cause him anxiety: "A guest who unduly troubles his host is considered unworthy" (Derech Eretz Zuta 8:9).

The Christian community must never consider the concept of hospitality to be optional. It is at the heart of the social consciousness of the Christian faith. The book of Hebrew reminds New Testament believers, recipients of the Jewish heritage of hospitality, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2; cf. Jas. 2:14–17; 1 Jn. 3:17). **JP**

A Passover meal begins in an Israeli home (April, 1965). The Passover Seder (home service) opens with the invitation, "Anyone who is hungry, come and eat. Anyone who is needy, come and partake of our Passover lamb."
(Israel Government Press Office)

*Note the useful treatment of this theme by R. Siegel, M. Strassfeld and S. Strassfeld, *The First Jewish Catalog* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), pp. 275–277. See also A. E. Kitov, *The Jew and His Home*, 5th ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1963), pp. 90–94.

Adapted from *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and Dayton, OH: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989), pp. 219–220, and used by permission.

Jesus' Attitude Toward Riches

In light of Jesus' demand of the rich young ruler to relinquish his entire fortune, one might assume that Jesus demanded this of every disciple; however, it is not certain that Jesus viewed poverty as the ideal state.

by David Bivin

Certain circles within the Judaism of Jesus' day took the view that there was something spiritually beneficial in poverty per se, that it was a mark of God's special favor to be poor.[1] Given Jesus' admission that "the Son of Man has come eating and drinking," and the accusation that therefore he was a "glutton and a drunkard,"[2] it seems unlikely that Jesus would have been accepted in such circles. He possessed too much of the moderation that characterized main-stream Pharisaism.[3]

There are a number of passages in the Synoptic Gospels which suggest that Jesus may have held extreme views regarding wealth, but on closer examination one finds that this probably was not the case.

No Fixed Abode

> And Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."[4]

This could indicate that Jesus was abjectly poor. However, it more likely reflects the typical life of a first-century sage who was constantly traveling and thus had no fixed abode.

Hatred of Mammon?

> No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.[5]

"Love" and "hate" are not always the absolute terms in Hebrew that they are in English. "Love," when contrasted with "hate," can mean "to put first, to prefer."[6] In Luke 14:26 (parallel to Matthew 10:37), for instance, Jesus is quoted as saying that a disciple must "hate" his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even himself. Surely Jesus only meant that his disciples must love him above their families and themselves. To "hate" money in any absolute sense is foreign to the general teaching of Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:10, it is the love of money, not money itself, that is the root of all evil.

Sacrificial Giving

> He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Amen! I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had."[7]

This is probably not an endorsement to give away all one's money. Jesus praised this poor widow because, even though she had given only two small coins, her gift was more sacrificial and proportionately larger than that of the people who had donated much larger sums. Jesus seems to be making the same point as that found in Tobit 4:8–9: "If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion...so you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity."

Empty Pockets

> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals....[8]

The impression created here is that Jesus instructed his disciples to live in poverty. This is strengthened by Peter's reply in Acts 3:6 to a beggar who asked for alms: "I do not have silver and gold...."[9] One must realize, however, that the disciples did have sandals, bags and purses—they simply were told not to take them on this particular journey. Jesus intended his

disciples to be supported during this preaching journey by the families that hosted them.[10]

In addition to being supported during their travels by hospitable families, Jesus and his itinerating band of disciples were also supported by some of the women who accompanied them, such as the wife of one of Herod Antipas' officials. According to Luke 8:3, these women "served them by their wealth." Obviously, Jesus had not required these women to distribute all their wealth to the poor, otherwise they would have had nothing to share with Jesus and his disciples.

"In Jesus' view, wealth and the Kingdom of Heaven were not necessarily mutually exclusive."

Apparently, therefore, Jesus viewed money as a means for good and not only a hindrance to piety. Merely being wealthy did not prevent one's spiritual growth; it was the pursuit of wealth as one's primary goal in life that prevented entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. One senses a similar attitude behind the praise in the Talmud for the fabulously wealthy Nakdimon (Nicodemus) ben Gurion who, while remaining wealthy, was also very generous in his giving.[11]

No Earthly Treasures

> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust devour, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven....[12]

Although this appears to be an instruction to flee from wealth and would seem to indicate that Jesus felt money was inherently evil, it actually is nothing more than Jesus' typical exhortation to prefer the things above, to love the Kingdom of Heaven more than family, wealth, etcetera. In Jesus' view, wealth and the Kingdom of Heaven were not necessarily mutually exclusive, as can be seen from his comments in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and his righteousness and *all these things* will be yours as well."

Jesus did not condemn a man who happened to be rich. The attitude he expressed was identical to that found in Derech Eretz Zuta 3:3: "If you have been favored with mammon, use it for alms as long as you have it. Obtain [literally, "buy"] with your mammon this world and world to come." It is precisely this idea that lies behind Jesus' exhortation in Luke 16:9 to "make friends for yourselves with the mammon of unrighteousness so that when it fails, you will be received into the eternal habitations."

The Choking Tentacles of Riches

> And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.[13]

Although Jesus taught that riches might choke the spiritual growth of some disciples, he listed riches as only one of the choking "thorns," and it is doubtful that he meant to give the impression that spiritual unfruitfulness was the necessary result of riches in every case. A man's wealth need not be a spiritual hindrance to him if he uses it to help the poor.

The Rich Can't Get In

> How difficult it is for those who have possessions to come into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to come into the Kingdom of God.[14]

On the surface, Jesus appears to be saying that it is impossible for anyone who is wealthy to receive eternal life. Actually, this metaphor of the camel and the needle's eye is only another of the verbal caricatures that Jesus loved to use. Jesus is saying here no more than what he said in Luke 16:13: One cannot love, that is, put first, two masters. A disciple must choose what is more important to him—mammon or God. As long as a disciple's wealth is not more important than God, as long as it does not prevent him from serving God, then a disciple is free to have possessions.

Giving Up One's Wealth

> You lack one thing more. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.[15]

This is the only recorded occasion on which Jesus made such a demand, and it seems likely that it was tailored specifically to the condition of the man's heart. Jesus knew that this rich man's money was the most important thing in his life, and

because the man loved his possessions more than studying Torah at Jesus' feet, the test of discipleship *for him* was to give up his wealth. It was not a universal test, and Jesus did not make such a demand of others, even of other rich men. Another prospective disciple might have been asked to give up profession or position in life to prove that he had in fact put the Kingdom of Heaven first.[16] **JP**

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1. The Hasidim were perhaps the most influential proponents of this philosophy in first-century Israel. These were a stream of Galilean sages who were close in theology to the Pharisees while at the same time in tension with them because the Hasidim emphasized the doing of good deeds more than the study of Torah. Jerusalem School member Shmuel Safrai has carried out extensive research on the Hasidim. He contends that Jesus, though not a Hasid, was similar to the Hasidim in many ways. Safrai argues that Jesus, like the Hasidim, idealized poverty: Jesus lived a pauper's life, and also demanded of his disciples that they give up all their material wealth. Safrai's article, "Jesus and the Hasidim," appeared in the January/June 1994 issue of *Jerusalem Perspective* (pp. 3–22).

Many outstanding scholars have held Safrai's view regarding Jesus' attitude toward wealth. In his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Claude Montefiore quotes Kirsopp Lake (apparently in agreement with Lake): "Professor Lake has said: 'I think Jesus clearly taught that riches ought to be rejected and given to the poor. He not only said so quite definitely to the rich man who asked his advice, but he denied the possibility (apart from the special act of God) that rich men can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I have not the smallest doubt but that Jesus said this and meant it. I do not believe that he meant it as exceptional teaching. Poverty was his rule of life, yet I do not think it is the right rule of life, or that it is practicable if civilization is to continue' (*The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* [1925], p. 155)" (C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. [London: Macmillan & Co., 1927], 2:559–560).

Vincent Taylor comments on Mark 10:21: "Commentators are right in saying that Jesus does not demand the universal renunciation of property, but gives a command relative to a particular case. Nevertheless, as Lohmeyer, 211, points out, Jesus Himself appears to have chosen a life of poverty; He wanders to and fro without a settled home (Mk. i. 39, Lk. ix. 58), His disciples are hungry (Mk. ii. 23, viii. 14), women provide for His needs (Lk. viii. 3), and His disciples can say 'Ἰδοὺ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήκαμέν σοι [Behold we left everything and followed you] (Mk. x. 28)" (*The Gospel according to St. Mark* [London: Macmillan & Co., 1952], p. 429). Here, Taylor first seems to agree that Jesus did not idealize poverty, then qualifies his view by quoting another scholar.

Shmuel Safrai has noted: "Hasiduth [the belief and practice of the Hasidim] is generally associated with the conception of humility" ("Teaching of Pietists in Mishnaic Literature," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 [1956], p. 17, note 13). It seems likely that in a number of rabbinic passages the word עניות (*ʿa-ni-YUT*) refers not to poverty but to humility. This certainly is true of its usage in Seder Eliyahu Zuta 3 (p. 176), where the poor "whom humility [not poverty] becomes" are contrasted with the haughty:

(continued on page 13)

A poor man eating lunch at the Beit-Shealtiel soup kitchen in Tel Aviv (March 1975).
(Israel Government Press Office)

Is the Sage Worth His Salt?

Joseph Frankovic, who studied under Jerusalem School member Brad Young for five years, is working toward a Ph.D. in Midrash at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He currently resides in Jerusalem where he is a visiting research student at the Hebrew University.

The Gospels record that questions were sometimes put to the sage Jesus of Nazareth in order to "test" him. According to Joseph Frankovic, the questioner's intent may not always have been hostile.

by Joseph Frankovic

In a rabbinic text written in the land of Israel about a century after the founding of the Byzantine Empire a story is told about Rabbi Yannai.[1] The story begins in this manner:

> Once while Rabbi Yannai was walking on a road he met a man who was finely dressed. He said to him, "Rabbi, would you consider an invitation to our home?"
>
> The man replied, "Whatever pleases you."
>
> Rabbi Yannai escorted the man into his home. He examined his knowledge of Bible, but found him wanting. He examined his knowledge of Mishnah, but found him wanting. He examined his knowledge of Talmud, but found him wanting. He examined his knowledge of Aggadah, but found him wanting....[2]

Having failed Yannai's expectations four times, the poor guest demonstrates his absolute ignorance of the teaching of the sages when he declines an invitation to recite the standard blessing for the meal. The reason is clear: he does not know it.[3] Instead of leading the blessing, the guest agrees to recite after Yannai, who says, "A dog has eaten Yannai's bread." But like many rabbinic stories, the plot has a startling twist, and in the end it is Yannai who is found wanting.

To an American or European, Yannai's behavior would be offensive, but to an ancient Jew living in Israel during the third or fourth century, it would have been tolerable. Why? Yannai erroneously assumed his guest to be a learned student of the sages.[4] The chance meeting which took place on the road is, therefore, one that involved two individuals devoted to a life of Torah, at least this is what Yannai thought.

In antiquity when two sages crossed paths, it was not unusual for the hometown sage to ask the other a difficult question regarding the Torah, even before any sort of greetings were exchanged.[5] Apparently, this practice established a sort of rabbinic pecking order. Non-local or up-and-coming sages were questioned in public in order to ascertain their level of expertise. Those who answered wisely earned for themselves a respected reputation. Those who did not, well...there were always other career options.

This aspect of rabbinic culture was probably in its inceptive stages in the time of Jesus. Passage such as Luke 10:25–37 and Mark 10:2–9, where Jesus is asked publicly an "offensive" question, should be read with the above background information in mind. These passages, rightly understood, can provide an important corrective for certain misconceptions that Christian preaching and teaching have sometimes fostered.[6]

When a lawyer or a Pharisee directs a question toward Jesus, one need not assume that his motives are wicked. Jesus is indeed being tested, but within the expected cultural parameters of his day and age. In some cases, the lawyer or Pharisee may be sincerely offering a difficult question about Torah to Jesus, the young Galilean sage with a budding reputation, and in others, just checking to see if the new sage in town is really worth his salt. JP

1. Yannai was a Galilean sage who flourished at the very beginning of the third century A.D. It is possible that this story reflects conditions

from the same period in which Yannai lived.

2. Leviticus Rabbah 9:3 (ed. Margulies, pp. 176–177). The English translation has been done by the author.

3. Margulies comments: שאפילו ברכת מזון לא ידע (line 11, p. 177).

4. Margulies comments: ומעה בו ר' יאי וחשב שהוא תלמיד חכם (line 1, p. 177).

5. Compare Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 108a and Bava Batra 22a. In Shabbat 108a the story is told of Rav's arrival in Nehardea. Karna was sent by Shmuel in order to test Rav's expertise. Rav, Shmuel, and Karna flourished in Babylonia at the beginning of the third century A.D. In Bava Batra 22a a similar story is told about Rav Dimi of Nehardea. He was denied the privilege of selling his dried figs in the market of Mahoza when he failed to answer Rav Adda bar Abba's question about the case of a basket that is eaten and then excreted by an elephant. Adda bar Abba was sent by Rava to examine Rav Dimi of Nehardea. (These two sources were brought to the author's attention by Professor Richard Kalmin of The Jewish Theological Seminary.) Rava, Adda and Dimi lived during the fourth century A.D. in Babylonia. See the entry "Dimi of Nehardea" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 6:49. Note the Aramaic idiom, פוק (זיל) חזי ליה בקנקניה (go and smell his jar), which appears in both stories. It means "to examine a person's mental capacity." See Marcus Jastrow's *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, p. 1395.

6. This article touches upon the larger issue of the relationship of Jesus to the leaders of the Jewish people, namely the Pharisees. Traditionally, the Pharisees have been viewed as enemies of Jesus, who seek to kill him. Two important works for rethinking Christianity's attitude toward the Pharisees are David Flusser's Foreword to Robert L. Lindsey's *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 4–5; and Adolph Büchler's discussion of Honi and his prayer for rain in *Types of Jewish-Palestinian Piety from 70 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.*, especially p. 254.

Jesus' Attitude Toward Poverty

(continued from page 11)

> Scripture says: "You will save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low" [2 Sam. 22:28]. "You will save a humble people"—this refers to the people [of Israel] whom humility becomes. "You eyes are on the haughty to bring them low"these are the [heathen] nations of the world.

Notice how much stronger is the saying of Elijah in the Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 9b, when *ʿa·ni·YUT* is taken to mean humility rather than poverty:

> The Holy One, blessed be he, went through all the good qualities and the only one which he found that was good enough to give to Israel was humility.

Even the popular saying recorded in Leviticus Rabbah 13, "Humility becomes Israel like a red strap across the breast of a white horse," falls flat if *ʿa·ni·YUT* is translated as poverty.

2. Mt. 11:19.

3. For an excellent survey of the Pharisaic view that, in general, poverty is an evil, see Israel Abrahams' chapter, "Poverty and Wealth," in *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917, 1924; repr. in one volume by Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1967), 1:113–117.

4. Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58.

5. Lk. 16:13.

6. For examples of this Hebraic nuance of "hate," see the entry "*hate*" in "Comments on the Hebrew Reconstruction" under the heading "Luke 14:26," "Counting the Cost of Discipleship: Lindsey's Reconstruction of the Rich Young Ruler Complex," *Jerusalem Perspective* 42, 43 & 44 (Jan./Jun. 1994), 31–32; note 19.

7. Lk. 21:1–4.

8. Lk. 10:4.

9. Also supportive of Safrai's view is the fact that in Acts 2:44–45 we read that the early believers sold their properties and possessions and held all things in common. Compare the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) and Acts 4:34–35. However, note that Peter told Ananias and Sapphira, "While you owned the property, was it not yours to do with as you pleased?" In other words, their only sin was in pretending to have donated the full amount of the property.

10. Compare Lk. 10:7.

11. Ketubot 66b–67a. Nakdimon was one of the three wealthiest men in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 66 A.D. (Gittin 56a).

The Talmud likewise showers praise upon the convert King Monobaz of Adiabene (mid-first century A.D.) for his generosity in helping those in need. When criticized for dissipating the kingdom's treasures accumulated by his ancestors, Monobas replied: "My ancestors stored up below, but I am storing up above...my ancestors gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the world to come" (Bava Batra 11a; cf. Mishnah, Yoma 3:10; Tosefta, Yoma 2:3; Genesis Rabbah 46:10; Josephus, Antiquities 20:75, 92–96).

12. Mt. 6:19–20.

13. Mt. 13:22; Mk. 4:18–19; Lk. 8:14.

14. Mt. 19:23–24; Mk. 10:23–25; Lk. 18:24–25.

15. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.

16. The Kingdom of Heaven is a collective term used by Jesus to refer to his apprenticed disciples. One probably should not draw conclusions about what Jesus advocated for normal life from what he demanded of those select few whom he called to a rigorous life of in-service training. Would Jesus, for instance, have made it a general rule that acceptance of his teaching precluded burying one's father or mother? Stern demands such as those Jesus made of the rich man (Lk. 18:22) were directed towards potential disciples, not the general public. It should also be noted that discipleship was not usually permanent. Although a disciple's internship sometimes lasted for years, it was essentially temporary, a period of life devoted to intensive study of Torah.

King Parables

One of the many results of Synoptic research is the discovery of parallels between the sayings of Jesus and those of other Jewish sages. A knowledge of these parallels can provide added insight into what Jesus was teaching.

by David Bivin

Rabbinic Parallels

The "king parable" is a special form of parable often used by Jesus. The Reform rabbi and scholar Ignaz Ziegler collected 937 "king parables" from rabbinic literature and published them in 1903 in his *Die Koenigsgleichnisse des Midrasch* (Parables of Kings in the Midrash) in Breslau, Poland. The following is an example, preceded by a typical dialogue between a teacher and his disciples:

> Rabbi Eliezer [last half of first century A.D.] said: "Repent one day before your death."
>
> His disciples asked him: "But can a man know on what day he will die?"
>
> He said: "All the more reason for him to repent today; perhaps he will die tomorrow. It follows that a man should repent every day. Thus in his wisdom Solomon said: 'Let your garments always be white,* and never let your head be without ointment' [Ecclesiastes 9:8]."
>
> Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai [Eliezer's teacher] told a parable: "It is like a king who invited his servants to a feast and did not set the time for them to arrive. The wise adorned themselves and waited by the door of the palace, for they said: 'Is there anything lacking in a palace?' The foolish continued working, for they said: 'Is a feast ever given without preparation?'
>
> Suddenly the king summoned his servants. The wise entered the palace adorned as they were, and the foolish entered in their work clothes.
>
> The king rejoiced when he saw the wise, but was angry when he saw the foolish, and said: 'Those who adorned themselves for the feast shall sit down and eat and drink; but those who did not adorn themselves for the feast shall stand and look on.'" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 153[a])

Note the striking similarity between the above parable and the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1–12:

> It will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise, for when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.
>
> But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him."
>
> Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."
>
> But the wise replied, "There may not be enough for both us and you. Go to those who sell oil and buy for yourselves."
>
> While they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.
>
> Afterward, the other virgins also came, and said, "Lord, lord, open to us."
>
> But he replied, "I tell you, I do not know you."

Here is another example of a "king parable" from rabbinic literature, followed by its interpretation:

The matter may be compared to a king who arranged a banquet and invited guests to it. The king issued a decree that stated, "Each guest must bring something on which to recline."

Some brought carpets, others brought mattresses or pads or cushions or stools, while still others brought logs or stones.

The king observed what they had done, and said, "Let each man sit on what he brought."

Those who had to sit on wood or stone murmured against the king. They said, "Is it respectful for the king that we, his guests, should be seated on wood and stone?"

When the king heard this, he said to them, "It is not enough that you have disgraced with your wood and stone the palace that was erected for me at great cost, but you dare to invent a complaint against me! The lack of respect paid to you is the result of your own actions."

Similarly, in the hereafter the wicked will be sentenced to Gehenna and will murmur against the Holy One, blessed be he: "We sought his salvation. How could such a fate befall us?"

He will answer them, "When you were on earth did you not quarrel and slander and do evil? Were you not responsible for strife and violence? That is why it is written, 'All you that kindle a fire, that encircle yourselves with firebrands, walk in the flame of your fire and among the brands that you have kindled' [Isa. 50:11]. If you say, 'This we have from your hand,' it is not so. You have brought it upon yourselves, and therefore, 'you will lie down in torment' [Isa. 50:11]." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:9)

Note the similarities between the above parable and the parable of the banquet in Luke 14:16–24:

A certain man once prepared a large banquet and invited many guests. When it was time for the banquet, he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."

One after another they began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. I beg of you, have me excused."

Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. I beg of you, have me excused."

Still another said, "I have just got married, and therefore I cannot come."

The slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger ordered his slave, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

"Master," the slave said, "what you ordered has been done, and there is still room."

Then the master ordered his slave, "Go out to the roads and hedges and force people to come, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will taste my banquet." (Luke 14:16–24) **JP**

*Compare 1 John 3:3, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

Transliteration Key

Hebrew & Aramaic

Syllables of transliterated words are separated by dots. Capitalization is used to indicate the accented syllable in words of more than one syllable. See p. 11 of the Nov/Dec 1989 issue for a full description of the transliteration system used in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE.

Consonants

א – ʾ (silent)
ב – b
בּ – v
ג – g
ד – d
ה – h (or silent)
ו – v
ז – z
ח – ḥ (voiceless guttural)
ט – t
י – y (or silent)
כ – k
כ ך* – ḵ (like ch in the Scottish *loch*)
ל – l
מ ם* – m
נ ן* – n
ס – s
ע – ʿ (voiced guttural)
פ – p
פ ף* – f
צ ץ* – ts (like ts in nets)
ק – k
ר – r
שׁ – sh
שׂ – s
ת – t

*The form of the letter at the end of a word.

Vowels

(The א is used here as a point of reference.)

אַ – a (like a in father; rarely like o in bone)
אָ, אֳ – a (like a in father)
אֶ – e (like e in net, or e in hey, or somewhere in between)
אֵ, אֱ – e (like e in net)
אִ, אִי – i (like i in ski)
אֹ, אוֹ, אוֹ – o (like o in bone)
אֻ, אוּ – u (like u in flu)
אְ – e (silent, or as short as e in happening, or as long as e in net)

Diphthongs

אַי – ai
אָי – oi
אֻי – ui

Greek

Transliterations are based on the Society of Biblical Literature system.

JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE would like to thank J. R. Barnett of Healaugh, Tadcaster, U.K.; Rodney & Diana Burrow of Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.A.; Dr. Michael & Ruby Butchko of Riverside, California, U.S.A.; the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies of Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.; Esther, Rebecca & Lynda McCoy of Robinson, Illinois, U.S.A.; Gerald & Mary McPhillips of Culpeper, Virginia, U.S.A.; and Daniel Pierce of Saugus, California, U.S.A. Their generous contributions helped make this issue possible.

International Synoptic Society

The International Synoptic Society supports the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research by serving as a vehicle through which interested individuals can participate in the School's research.

The Society raises financial support for publication of research carried out by the Jerusalem School (for example, the *Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary*), facilitates informal discussion groups focusing on the Synoptic Gospels, and sponsors student research assistants and other volunteers who work with the Jerusalem School.

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Our representatives will answer questions and present a program that includes the showing of a video filmed in Israel. The video incorporates interviews with members of the Jerusalem School.

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The Jerusalem School

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The Jerusalem School scholars believe the first narrative of Jesus' life was written in Hebrew, and that much of it can be recovered from the Greek texts of the Synoptic Gospels. The School's central objective is to reconstruct as much as possible of that conjectured Hebrew narrative. This is an attempt to recover a lost Jewish document from the Second Temple period, a Hebrew scroll that, like so much Jewish literature of the period, has been preserved only in Greek.

As a means to its objective, the Jerusalem School has begun preparations for production of the *Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary*, a detailed commentary on the Synoptic Gospels that will reflect the insight provided by the School's research. Current research of Jerusalem School members and others is reported in the pages of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE.

The Jerusalem School was registered in Israel as a non-profit research institute in 1985. Its members are Prof. David Flusser, Dr. Robert L. Lindsey, Prof. Shmuel Safrai, David Bivin, Dr. Weston W. Fields, Dr. R. Steven Notley, Dwight A. Pryor, Halvor Ronning, Mirja Ronning, Prof. Chana Safrai and Prof. Bradford H. Young.