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THE MARK OF ZOROASTER

Reverend's General Warning: Overdoses of Bible, whilst not usually fatal these days, can cause torpor and impotence, especially in combination with ancient history. If you have had enough for one book, you might consider reading just the first two and final two paragraphs of this chapter, and skimming or skipping the rest.

If, however, you have developed some tolerance, a few more lines in the company of Hammurabi, Hezekiah, Moses and Titus, and you might even meet the Messiah.

Read responsibly. Winners don't do undue Deuteronomy.

Ω

Doom mongering on the streets of Jerusalem was as popular 2,000 years ago as it is today. *The Apocalypse of John* was only one of many *apocalypses* circulating (including *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Psalms of Solomon*, *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Assumption of Moses*, *The Apocalypse of Moses*, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Testament of Abraham*, *The Secrets of Enoch*, and *The Ascension of Isaiah*) and Jesus was only one of many 'Messiahs' troubling the authorities at the turn of the millennium.

Mashiyach in Hebrew means 'anointed one' (from *masiah*, to anoint), but the meaning of the term has always been changeable, as meaning

is wont to be. It was originally a powerful political ruler chosen by God. Saul, the first king of Israel, was called *mashiyach* for his service to the Jews,¹ as was King Hezekiah.² The Messiah only became a saviour to wipe out all ills later, with the Babylonian invasion and exile. *Isaiah* outlined at this time the various conditions the *mashiyach* must meet: he will be a descendent of King David,³ he will fill the world with knowledge of God,⁴ and bring an end to disease, hunger and death.⁵ Jesus failed to liberate the Jews from the Romans, and he failed to meet many of *Isaiah's* conditions, making his claim to Messiahhood somewhat shaky amongst traditionalists. His story did, however, succeed in liberating some Jews from their laws, and in taking the Book to the Gentiles. Jesus was also the guy who made the end nigh.

Ten centuries earlier, on the cusp of the Iron Age, the Hebrews conquered Jerusalem and built a temple to house the ark they had been lugging around the desert. The nomads settled and the temple became the centre of the world for the next 400 years, where daily sacrifice continued, and all aspects of religious and civil life were administered. In 586BC, however, the unthinkable happened. Babylonians destroyed the temple, exiling the Chosen People from the Promised Land and the centre of the universe. 'The crown is fallen from our head',⁶ goes the lament, and they sat down and wept, and listened to reggae as they remembered Zion.

Time shifted along with place. Months had traditionally begun in Jerusalem when the new moon was observed, and the discrepancy between the lunar and solar year was dealt with by adding a month before harvest season if the barley was still unripe. In Babylon, however, exiles began to use the mathematically determined Babylonian calendar, which is why one month is named after the hated Babylonian god Tammuz.⁷ Without a city to keep the people together, festivals became more important. The Levites remained the priestly caste, but other tribal divisions ceased to be important as the Jews were all thrown together. Perhaps the most dramatic changes involved the text. A new Hebrew script was introduced, and text took on a new importance. Away from the temple and priestly dictates, scripture became the highest authority. Men began to analyse and debate textual details and correspondences, as religious Jews have been doing ever since, and scribes became the religious authorities of the community.⁸

The end came in the mid-sixth century BC, when Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon. Cyrus was the original apocalyptic emperor. His Zoroastrian crusade, which won the largest empire the world had ever known, was in preparation for the immanent final battle between good and evil. This dualism was central to his cosmology, and it necessitates

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a catastrophic conclusion. The religion mixed well with the dualistic legalism of Babylon. Centuries before, King Hammurabi had created one of the earliest law codes, setting into stone lawful and unlawful, and hence right and wrong. Though the laws have changed, the fundamental dichotomy has remained essentially the same amongst the heirs of Zoroastrian thought.

Cyrus was unlike any emperor before him, who ruled with a humanity unknown in ancient warrior culture, sparing foreign kings rather than flaying them alive or poking out their eyes, protecting his newly acquired subjects rather than massacring or enslaving them. Another completely novel notion was that his supreme deity might be the same as those of others. He saw a likeness between the Jewish deity and his *Ahura Mazda* ('wise Lord')⁹ so he set the Jews free to rebuild their temple and help fight the forces of evil. As a liberator, he was honoured as the only Gentile *mashiyach* in history. He was not, of course, of the line of David, but this did not seem to matter:

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed (*mashiyach*), to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; ... I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight¹⁰

God swapping was also novel to the Jews. In earlier Jewish books, *YHVH* is supreme in the sense that He is tougher and better than the gods of all other peoples. With the enforced cosmopolitanism of the exile, however, he becomes the supreme god responsible for all humanity, and the Jewish distinction is that they are His Chosen People.

Cyrus' innovations were passed on to not only his descendents, but also to the hostages. Ezra led his people home in 537BC, and they took the apocalyptic bug with them. Of the four major prophetic books, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Daniel* and the latter part of *Isaiah* date from these turbulent times,¹¹ and all describe a catastrophic final showdown in Babylonian imagery. Flames devouring the world, final judgement, punishment for the wicked and resurrection are all Zoroastrian motifs not found in pre-Babylonian books of *The Bible*.

As well as prophesy, dream interpretation, which made Daniel famous in Babylon, may have been picked up from the Babylonian magi. Many of the famous rabbinical stories also date from Babylon, and were later recorded in *The Babylonian Talmud*. It appears that the very idea of a written law was also an adoption. In most of the world, behaviour was checked by local custom and the whim of the local chief. Whereas the earlier Sumerian law code was not universal, Hammurabi's law applied to rich and poor alike, to noblemen and commoners throughout the cities of Babylonia. Despite the alleged

antiquity and divinity of the Mosaic Code, the similarities with the Hammurabi Code suggest very strongly that the Hammurabi Code was the template. For example the quintessentially Biblical 'breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth'¹² is suspiciously close to Hammurabi's:

If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out...
If he break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken. If
a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked
out.¹³

Other similarities include exile or execution for incest,¹⁴ execution of both parties for adultery,¹⁵ an imperative to honour one's parents,¹⁶ and laws against false witness¹⁷ and theft.¹⁸ Both discuss how a slave can buy his freedom,¹⁹ in both the theft of an animal is punished with a fine of more of the same animal,²⁰ and the same ruling is given on legal liability: if an ox gores someone, its owner is only culpable if it had a history of such behaviour and had not been kept tied up.²¹

The codes sometimes conclude differently on exactly the same question. In Babylon, for example, children could be executed for the crimes of their fathers,²² but *Deuteronomy* expressly forbids this.²³ The Hammurabi Code prescribed execution for harbouring a runaway slave, but in Jewish law 'thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee'.²⁴ Indeed, one big difference is that Mosaic Law protects slaves, as one might expect for a code adopted by people in exile.

Despite the lamentations, there was clearly some textual intercourse going on in Babylon. The same characters crop up, like Sarsechim, named in both *Jeremiah* and an ancient Babylonian tablet,²⁵ and there appear to be linguistic influences even in the very first chapter of *Genesis*.²⁶ As the new calendar regulated the year, new laws regulated behaviour. Right and wrong were coded, the lawmaker was equated with the supreme god, and the Jewish *mashiyach* was written into the Babylonian myth of the end times. In *Baba-loca-lips*, we savour some more delicious Babylonian enigmas, and meet the Whore of Babylon at the Tower of Babel, but for now let us note that in only 50 years of captivity, Jewish life and religion were completely overhauled.

So what was what was Jewish culture like before the exile? *The Second Book of Kings* tells a remarkable story about how *The Book of Moses* was found mysteriously fifteen years before the Babylonian invasion:

Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.²⁷

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One might think that finding a Bible in a synagogue would be no great surprise, but the King was as ignorant of this book as the High Priest. 'And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.'²⁸ He decided to spread the word:

And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book... And the king ... made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.²⁹

The king then destroyed the pagan religion the people had been keeping:

And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the **grove** [*sic*] from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the **grove** [*sic*] ... And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun... And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the **groves** [*sic*], and filled their places with the bones of men. ... And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars... Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.³⁰ [*incredulous italics mine*]

The King is not happy, clearly, but something is unclear in this passage. How do you take a grove out of the synagogue and burn it? Why are sodomites weaving for a grove? Is this some bizarre holding house for tree-hugging perverts in the temple forecourt? Here, as in other places, the *KJV* translates uncomfortable scripture into nonsense. 'Grove' is '*Ashtoreth*' in more honest Bibles, even in more accurate passages of the *KJV*. She is Astarte, the goddess of love and sex, whose priestesses made love to worshippers in pagan temples throughout the Middle East, including, as we learn here, in the Holy Land. The

'sodomites' are priestesses, and Ashtoreth, when not hidden in a clump of trees, is 'the abomination of the Zidonians'.³¹

Later we will unveil Ashtoreth and gaze at her with more appreciation than did the Jewish scribes and their treacherous quill-wielding descendents. In the meantime, we need note only that Jewish religion had been pagan since Solomon's reign:

And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.³²

Traditional apologetics has it that the wise and good and not remotely pagan king made an alliance with the Zidonians, and so their religion was practiced in the land. If this is the case, the abomination was so well installed that the Book of Moses had been completely forgotten until fifteen years before Nebuchadnezzar invaded. This is a little difficult to believe. It seems more likely that the scribes gained control of Jewish religion in Babylon, and injected a good dose of new material, rewriting the history of the tribe in the light of the unhappy events of defeat and exile,³³ and constructing a new religion. Instructions on how to maintain the state cult are given in *Ezekiel*, which was also written in the period of exile, and Passover began to be celebrated. It had not been kept from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah,³⁴ so perhaps it had never been kept at all.

It appears that there was nothing monotheistic about Hebrew religion at all, but this idea **was** current in Babylon. Whilst there were many Babylonian gods, the essence of each was thought to be the same, as a Babylonian tablet dating from Nebuchadnezzar's reign attests:

Nabu is Marduk of accounting

Sin is Marduk as illuminator of the night

Shemash is Marduk of justice

Ahad is Marduk of rain³⁵

Here Marduk is the chief god, and other gods are not subordinate to him but aspects of him, parts of the same Almighty God. There was, however, another notable monotheistic current in the ancient world. It lasted in Egypt only for the reign of Amenhotep IV, the first and last monotheistic Pharaoh. After his death, pagan religion was restored and he was remembered as a heretic, but perhaps his heresy lived on in the

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character of Moses. The year of Moses' birth given in *The Bible* is exactly the same as that of Amenhotep IV, and Moses may be an adopted baby in more ways than one. His sudden emergence in Jewish religion around the time of the Babylonian invasion, and the remembrance of his deeds at Passover, may be because the entire legend, including the servitude of the Jews, was adopted. Borrowing legends is not uncommon; the snake, the garden, the flood, and the tower were all stories told in Sumer, though the paternalistic overtones begin with *The Bible*.³⁶

The Egyptians kept extensive records, and amongst these Israel is named only once, not as slaves but a tribe occupying Jordan in the 13th century BC.³⁷ There are far more references to the Apiru. There is no archaeological evidence for a Hebrew homeland before Israel, but the Habiru / Hapiru / Apiru pop up at disparate sites all over the Middle East, from the Euphrates to the Nile Basin,³⁸ referred to in Ugaritic, Hittite, Canaanite, Mitanni, and Mesopotamian sources, from well before the supposed birth of Abraham.³⁹ In Egypt, they are variously described as enemies, prisoners, and slaves, which seems to support the Biblical story, but they also fought for the Egyptians as mercenaries.⁴⁰ Elsewhere they are servants, mercenaries,⁴¹ agricultural labourers, shepherds, scribes, and dependents of the temple,⁴² but in Sumer they are often outlaws. Their given names are local to various cities rather than tribal, and they shared neither language nor ethnicity.⁴³ They might be better described as a social class rather than a race, and it has been suggested that the term means 'vagrant', or 'migrant' from the Akkadian *habaru*, to migrate.⁴⁴ Meaning is wont to change, however, and in Egyptian it also came to mean deserter.⁴⁵

It has been suggested that in drought or other times of difficulty, when the poorest could no longer support themselves, they sometimes formed bands and left their homelands under charismatic leaders, and survived by pillage. The Moses story may be an echo of one such leader, emerging from obscurity to lead his downtrodden people on a mission (though the legend of a baby in a basket in the river is an old Babylonian story, and monotheism may have been adopted).⁴⁶ His warriors pillaged the tribes they encountered, as did Jephthah, 'a mighty man of valour, and ... the son of an harlot',⁴⁷ which could well be the profession of an outcast woman. David was another, whose outlaw band hid in caves and extracted protection from various settled peoples.⁴⁸

In concerned letters sent to Egypt from her vassal in Jerusalem, the Habiru were plundering territories and fermenting revolt in the area in the 14th century BC,⁴⁹ and other sources note their presence in Palestine

around this time. There is almost certainly some relation with the Hebrews who conquered Jerusalem, but the nature of that relationship is unclear. Did outcastes and rejects from various civilisations pool stories and rituals as they floated around the Middle East? With no common ethnicity or land, did they protect their group identity with food taboos, and the ritual of circumcision learned in Egypt?⁵⁰

How the Chosen were chosen, and how they chose their stories is not known. *The Old Testament* was not fixed into its present form until at least the sixth century AD, before which different sects used different versions, and *The Talmud* mentions 'corrections of the scribe'.⁵¹ The Masoretic text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Greek *Septuagint* (used in Egypt from the third century BC) are all different. The Samaritans, who are thought to be the original Israelites ousted from Jerusalem by the returning exiles, also had their own Bible in a different script, and today the last few hundred Samaritans still accept only the five books of Moses as divine, and Moses as the sole prophet. The evidence, however, does not support their claim that their scripture is unadulterated pre-Babylonian Judaism. Comparative studies reveal that it was simplified in places, and retranslated back from *The Septuagint*, and it is dated to no earlier than the second century AD.⁵² Religious reforms which began after the exiles returned drove many to seek sanctuary in Samaria. Fugitives priests like Manasseh, who was expelled a century after the repatriation, may have brought Babylonian influenced scripture to Samaria.⁵³ *The Samaritan Pentateuch* contains clues to the original faith, but it is still a mix of pre- and post-Babylonian Judaism.

There are 6,000 differences between *The Samaritan Pentateuch* and the Masoretic text. The non-anthropomorphic Samaritan God is probably pre-Babylonian. Elohim is also singular rather than a curious mix of singular and plural, as is the supreme deity in Zoroastrian prayer.⁵⁴ We know from *The Talmud* that Samaritans did not believe in resurrection,⁵⁵ though the doctrine was adopted later, (probably from Muslims, as the terminology is Arabic). The Samaritan *mashiyach* has nothing to do with the end of the world; he is a political restorer who will destroy the followers of Ezra.

The Samaritans do have, however, the laws and stories of Moses. The scribes who derived their authority from the reverence scripture commanded dominated Samaritan as well as Judean religion. Various scribes tweaked their texts to support their theology, so in *The Samaritan Pentateuch* the temple is to be built in Samaria rather than Jerusalem, but the law, once incorporated, was staying.⁵⁶

Relations between the tribes quickly deteriorated. The Samaritan offer to help rebuild the temple was refused,⁵⁷ Samaria declared

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independence in the fourth century, and Judaeans destroyed her temple in around 100BC.⁵⁸ Animosity is obvious in the Gospels,⁵⁹ and 'the good Samaritan' is the exception that proves the rule. When Jesus meets a Samaritan, he draws a parallel between her loose morals and her religion:

For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband... Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews⁶⁰

Here Jesus makes clear the distinction between Jews and non-Jews. The King of the Jews was a Jew, concerned with other Jews, not with polluted Samaritans, nor with Gentiles. 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel', he says to a woman who begs for his help,⁶¹ comparing Gentiles to dogs not fit to eat the bread of the Israelites. When she agrees and begs to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table, her daughter is healed. This is the Jewish Messiah in action, forcing Gentiles to acknowledge the supremacy of the Jews.⁶²

Whilst the Jews picked up all sorts in Babylon, they did not take home universalism. At some point, the Hebrews had become a highly exclusive group, and this was enshrined in law. We are reminded over 50 times in *Leviticus* that these are 'laws, which the Lord made between him and **the children of Israel**',⁶³ and one of the most grave punishments was to be cut off from the tribe.⁶⁴ The laws for Jews and non-Jews living amongst them were different,⁶⁵ with three exceptions, all of which were capital offences: slandering the Jewish God, disrespecting the Jewish holiday, and killing a man (in practice, a Jew).⁶⁶ The blasphemy law is particularly illuminating.⁶⁷ Whereas nearly all of *Leviticus* is a series of directives, these verses are different, dramatised with a story describing a half-caste blasphemer with an Egyptian father. It is as if only someone on the edge of the tribe has the kind of relationship with God that makes blasphemy thinkable.

Mixed-faith love affairs always end in tears in *The Old Testament*, and usually with a massacre as well. A man who marries 'the daughter of a strange god'⁶⁸ commits an abomination, and even today conversion to Judaism is a difficult process, and orthodox rabbis will not bless a mixed marriage. Jews generally lived in different neighbourhoods, ate different food, dressed differently, and spoke a different language. King Antiochus' attempt to integrate the Jews in the second century BC provoked the bloody Maccabean revolt. There were Gentiles interested in Judaism, including several Roman emperors' wives, and there was some mixing, but Jesus was not part of that mix, and he was not interested in converting the heathen. He travelled to tiny Jewish fishing

villages in distant regions, but he never visited the nearby Hellenistic metropolis of Sepphoris to preach to the Gentiles there.⁶⁹

Though Jesus attacked the Jewish law and its administrators, his message was still specifically for his people:

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, **O Israel**; The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength⁷⁰

Jesus is quoting the daily Jewish prayer here, to an audience of the people of **Israel**. He continues:

...and the second is... Thou shalt love **thy neighbour** as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.⁷¹

In today's multi-cultural Benetton advert of a world, we like to think that this means we should love everybody equally, but is this supported by the text? Neighbours are, by definition, people who live nearby, **not** the rest of the world. The original from *Leviticus* leaves no room for doubt:

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against **the children of thy people**, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself⁷²

After his death, Jesus' followers continued worshipping at the exclusively Jewish temple,⁷³ but as Christianity spread further and became more cosmopolitan, neighbourly love was extended with the Gospel 'unto the uttermost part of the earth'.⁷⁴ This was **not**, however, Jesus' message, at least as recorded in *Mark*, the earliest Gospel written. By *Matthew* the message had changed and the faith was beginning to open up:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you⁷⁵

The words and actions of this Yeshua fellow are buried under layers of legend written generations later by people with their own agendas. Stories contradict each other even in simple details such as who was executed with him, who witnessed the scene, and what was written on the execution stake. The only fact about the life of Jesus / Yeshua / Christus / Chrestus which Christian, Jewish, and pagan sources agree on is that it ended on a stick, courtesy of Pontius Pilate.¹ It was not

¹ See Exu's Journey

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Jesus but Paul who took the Good News from the King of the Jews to the Gentiles, and only after Paul were the laws on circumcision⁷⁶ and the food taboos relaxed.⁷⁷

The prophecies recorded in the Gospels are in the established Jewish apocalyptic tradition, warning of famine, pestilence, signs in the sky, and the realisation of things 'spoken of by Daniel'.⁷⁸ Almost the only innovation is the immanence of the end. *Old Testament* prophets specified the same events in the same city, but were either cryptic or silent regarding when.⁷⁹ By contrast, the Gospels note that 'this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.'⁸⁰

A few decades after Jesus' death, Rome destroyed the temple and broke the Jewish nation. Our only source for the events is Josephus Flavius, a Jew who joined the Romans and documented the campaigns for his commander Titus. Like all Roman historians, he was writing to glorify his patron, so his writing must be treated with some suspicion, but he could not bend too many facts because centurions who fought would have read his work. We also know from the archaeological record that his account of the events at Masada is accurate. He never mentions Jesus, so there is no reason to suspect Christian sympathies, and though he had been a Jewish priest, his writing abounds with pagan omens, so he was either a genuine convert or a thoroughly lapsed Jew. It is thought he genuinely believed that God had deserted the Jews for the Romans, as he wrote in *Bellum Judaicum*.⁸¹

Various Biblical prophecies appear to have been accurate. Of course, the Gospels date from after the campaign, and the authors could have doctored the story after the events, but books written centuries before, however, make similar prophecies. The Jews defeated the Roman garrison in 66AD, leaving a power vacuum,⁸² and a bloody struggle erupted between Samaritans, Judaeans, and other kingdoms. This had been foretold in *Ezekiel*, with lines about how the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim 'together shall be against Judah'⁸³ before the destruction of the temple. In the civil war, a particularly hardcore group called the Zealots stormed the temple itself, spilling blood in the Holiest of Holies.⁸⁴ The Zealots were trapped inside the temple, but managed to send a message to another Jewish tribe, who marched on Jerusalem. They killed everyone they met, and the corpses rotting the streets caused the pestilence predicted in *Leviticus*.⁸⁵

As written in *Matthew*, 'nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom'.⁸⁶ As the Jewish kingdoms fought amongst themselves, the Roman nation was mustering against the Jewish nation. *Deuteronomy* describes the subjugation of the Jews under a race 'from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation

whose tongue thou shalt not understand',⁸⁷ which applies to the Romans, including the symbology of the eagle, which *Hosea* also mentions.⁸⁸ The army that destroyed the temple was lead by Titus, whose father had recently become Caesar. This made Titus a prince, fulfilling Daniel's prophesy that 'the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary'.⁸⁹ He arrived to find Jerusalem in the throes of civil war, with a famine foreseen in *Deuteronomy*,⁹⁰ as well as the pestilence of *Leviticus*.⁹¹ He set up camp to hold off until events ran their course. According to Josephus, the famine was so severe that people were driven to cannibalism, as in *Leviticus*,⁹² where is written 'ye shall eat the flesh of your sons'.⁹³ This may be an embellishment taken directly from Jewish scripture, but the rest is clearly Roman history.

Luke was following tradition when he wrote about, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes accompanying the end.⁹⁴ Famine and pestilence were part and parcel of warfare, and cannibalism might have been an educated guess, but climactic predictions make for much braver prophecy. In *Daniel* 'the end thereof shall be with a flood',⁹⁵ and in *Isaiah* 'thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire'.⁹⁶ It appears that the prophets were on to something. According to Josephus, the night Titus finally attacked:

there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellings of the earth, that was in an earthquake.⁹⁷

He could be tailoring history to fit with prophesy, but soldiers serving, for whom Jewish prophesy was of no great concern, would be unlikely to forget a day when an invasion, a tempest, and an earthquake came together. Another spot on prophesy is in *Leviticus*, where 'I will bring a sword upon you... when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you'. They were indeed gathered together, as Josephus notes:

Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand, as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand, the greater part of whom were... not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a traitness among them that there came a pestilential destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly.⁹⁸

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'Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field,' predicted *Micah*.⁹⁹ The Romans did indeed run a plough over the ruins of the city before founding another in its place,¹⁰⁰ and they minted coins with an image of the ploughing. The devastation wrecked both the Jewish state and the Jewish psyche. Israel had been a mighty nation chosen by God, living with relative freedom under Roman rule, with enough chutzpah to attack the garrison. The Romans retaliated with crushing force, destroying the temple and the heart of Judaea, but the final blow came after another revolt in 135 AD. This time the Hadrian's response was utterly devastating. Another historian describes how:

very few of them in fact survived. Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, ... the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities.¹⁰¹

Hadrian banned circumcision, suppressed scriptural study,¹⁰² and forbade the Jews from entering Jerusalem.¹⁰³ The Jews lost their land and their centre, but kept the siege mentality as they wandered homeless and hated for most of the next two millennia. They were persecuted more or less continuously, under Rome and then the Holy Roman Empire, through the Crusades and the Russian pogroms, in the torture chambers of the Inquisition and the gas chambers of the Nazis, another army which smashed the Jewish world under the emblem of the eagle. Moving countries every few generations, with no security that the synagogue would survive another decade, Jews learned to carry the temple in their heads. The rabbis redacted centuries of oral history and law into a portable library for a Diaspora on the move, and rabbinic Judaism became a singularly cerebral affair, which could be performed in a shack in the shtetl or an attic in the ghetto.

In retrospect, and from a global perspective, the destruction of the temple was not the end of the world, as both the world and the Jews are still here, but there was no global perspective in the first century. In *Isaiah* 'the curse devoured the earth (*eretz*)',¹⁰⁴ but *eretz* has a local feeling, meaning country, region, city, and the Jewish homeland, as well as soil.¹⁰⁵ For the Children of Israel, the clashes Babylo-Biblical prophets had foreseen for centuries meant the destruction or transformation of everything they knew. As prophesied, the remnant that survived the wars ended up fugitives scattered amongst the heathen,¹⁰⁶ but one

obscure anarchist mystic arose from the grave to convert the Roman Empire and the pagan world.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.¹⁰⁷

Early Christian Jews were left with instructions to keep it simple and trust in the Holy Spirit,¹⁰⁸ and a story that grew as it was retold. The Habiru-Babylo-Bible went from Hebrew to Greek, absorbing ideas and stories as it spread through the melting pot of the Hellenistic world and beyond, bringing monotheistic dualism to a good chunk of the planet, and priming humanity for Scientism to take the rest. The message was already changing in the first century, it is barely recognisable today, but the story of our civilisation is an echo of the same Hebrew whisper.

History always circles back to the same point on a different plane, as if history is a slowly ascending spiral, and here we are again. An explosion of Jewish apocalyptic literature foreshadowed the catharsis in Jerusalem, and centuries later Renaissance apocalyptic texts and artistic innovations preceded the European apocalyptic wave. Today the world is flatter, and a wave washes over it more rapidly. In the late nineteenth century, realism began breaking down in art. H. G. Wells opened the science fiction book at the turn of the century, outlining utopia whilst predicting atom bombs and other aeon-wrenchers.¹⁰⁹ Plenty of artists are scratching the apocalyptic itch. There are literally hundreds of recent apocalyptic books, from *2012* to *How to Recognise the Antichrist*, and magazines from *The End is Nigh!* to *Towards 2012*. As before, many of today's prophets use cutting edge technologies. Countless websites announce the end, from the gloomy crew of Armageddon Online to the loony Jew of the Intergalactic Underground. DVD documentaries such as *Global Warming* and *The Last Hour* raise the alarm, and doomy feature films are being made like there's no tomorrow, including *Armageddon*, *Outbreak*, *Independence Day*, *Apocalypto*, *Dragon Wars*, *The Siege*, *Cloverfield*, *Children of Men*, *Volcano*, *Pirates of the Caribbean III: The End of the World*, and all three *Day After Tomorrow*'s. The Statue of Liberty looks on in various states of disrepair as New York is flooded, overwhelmed by killer viruses, scorched with lava, stormed by zombies, trampled by giant monsters, destroyed by aliens, and attacked by jihadis both in fact and fiction. Nowhere is safe. The final judgement has even been passed on Homer

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Simpson, and Horton the friendly elephant was called upon to save a tiny world on a speck from unimaginative denizens.ⁱ

There is a certain *déjà vu* in the air, with nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, brother against brother, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, floods, and the tremendous arrogance of a moribund culture. The Israelites were convinced they were invincible, and messed with a much stronger force. In hindsight, this was both arrogant and stupid, but not as stupid as our own last stand against the forces of nature, made with the blessings of the Pharisees of Scyense. A remnant of the Jews have returned to Israel, fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy,ⁱⁱ and trouble is brewing once more in Jerusalem, with the warring tribes upgrading their skuds to nukes. An apocalypse looms, my brothers and sisters, coming to your neighbourhood soon, wherever you are in the global village. The situation looks serious, but take heart, children of Zoroaster. When the earth quakes and civilisations clash, when identity cracks and your reality goggles melt, a rebirth is near. And if history is any guide, the end of the aeon means the beginning of another.

Ω

And now, my good congregation, we leave the distant past behind. The roots of transformation wind through the twentieth century, and flowers are blooming in the world we are about to enter. Soon enough, the Reverend will mount his soapbox with the book of *Revelation* in hand, and deliver a rousing exegesis on the end of the world, for the traditionalists in the pews, but first, some meta-history.

1 *I Samuel* 26:11

2 *Tractate Sanhedrin* 94a

3 *Isaiah* 11:1

4 *Isaiah* 11:9

5 *Isaiah* 25:8

6 *Lamentations* 5:16

7 *Ezekiel* 8:14-15

8 *Ezra* 7:11

ⁱ If, like me, you enjoy deranged Christian zombie films which make your bones itch, *The Day After Tomorrow II* is a must. Oh my gosh!

ⁱⁱ 'For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return' *Isaiah* 10:22

- 9 *The Ancient Near East* p. 234
- 10 *Isaiah* 45:1
- 11 *Who Wrote the Bible?* - Richard Elliot Friedman (New York, 1987) p. 100
- 12 *Leviticus* 24:20
- 13 *The Hammurabi Code* (L. W. King trans.), laws 196, 197 & 200
- 14 *Leviticus* 11. 20:17, *The Hammurabi Code* 154, 155
- 15 *Deuteronomy* 22:22 and *The Hammurabi Code*, law 129
- 16 *Deuteronomy* 5:16 and *The Hammurabi Code*, law 195
- 17 *Exodus* 23:1 and *The Hammurabi Code* laws 2 & 3
- 18 *Exodus* 20:15 and *The Hammurabi Code* laws 21 & 22
- 19 *Exodus* 21:2 and *The Hammurabi Code*, law 17
- 20 *Exodus* 22:1 and *The Hammurabi Code*, law 8
- 21 *Exodus* 21:28-29 and *The Hammurabi Code*, law 251
- 22 *The Hammurabi Code*, laws 210, 230
- 23 *Deuteronomy* 24:16
- 24 *Deuteronomy* 23:16
- 25 *The Economist*, April 12th 2008
- 26 Newsome, pp. 101-102
- 27 *II Kings* 22:8
- 28 *II Kings* 22:11
- 29 *II Kings* 23:2-3
- 30 *II Kings* 23:5-24
- 31 *II Kings* 23:13
- 32 *II Kings* 23:13
- 33 *By the Waters of Babylon: An Introduction to the History and Theology of the Exile* - James D. Newsome Jr. (Edinburgh, 1980) pp. 84-86
- 34 *II Kings* 23:22
- 35 From the Babylon Exhibition at the British Museum
- 36 *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* - James B. Pritchard (ed.) (Princeton, 1958) pp. 28-30
- 37 McNeill p. 229
- 38 Drews, p. 121
- 39 Pritchard, p. 261
- 40 *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe CA. 1200 BC* - Robert Drews (Princeton, 1993) p. 151
- 41 *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* - Mark W. Chavalas & K. Lawson Younger (Continuum International, 2003) p. 40
- 42 *Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt* - Carol A. Redmount in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, Michael D. Coogan, ed., (New York, 2001), p.98 & The Hab / piru - Moshe Greenberg (New Haven, 1955) p. 86
- 43 Coogan, p. 72
- 44 Drews, p. 121
- 45 *Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere* - Nadiv Na'Aman, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* vol. 45 (1986) pp. 271-288
- 46 *Chronicles concerning Early Babylonian Kings* - Leonard William King (London, 1907) vol. 2 pp. 87-91
- 47 *Judges* 11
- 48 *I Samuel* 25
- 49 *The Amarna Letters* - Moran, William L. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) letters EA 79, EA 75, EA 79
- 50 *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* - Hanafy M.H. et al in *Urology* 1974;1 pp. 114-120

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- 51 *Shemot Rabbah* 13:1
- 52 *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, O-Sh
- 53 *Antiquities of the Jews* - Josephus 11.8.2 & 4. Note, Josephus puts the date of Manasseh's expulsion at 332 BC, but this date is disputed
- 54 Campbell, p. 193
- 55 *Tractate Kutim* 28
- 56 *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* - David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, Astrid B. Beck (Eerdmans, 2000) p. 1160
- 57 *Ezra* 4:3
- 58 *2 Kings* 23:15
- 59 *John* 8:48
- 60 *John*, 4; 22
- 61 *Matthew* 15:24
- 62 *Matthew* 15:22-28
- 63 *Leviticus* 26; 46
- 64 *Leviticus* 17: 9
- 65 *Leviticus* 25:39 - 46
- 66 *Leviticus* 24:13-23
- 67 *Leviticus* 24:10-16
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- 69 *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* - A. N. Wilson (London, 1997) p. 17
- 70 *Mark* 12:29-30
- 71 *Mark* 12:28-31
- 72 *Leviticus* 19: 18
- 73 *Acts* 2:46
- 74 *Acts* 1:8
- 75 *Matthew* 5:43-44
- 76 *Galatians* 5,6
- 77 *Romans* 4
- 78 *Mark* 13:14
- 79 See *Daniel* 12:7-8
- 80 *Mark* 13:30
- 81 Wilson, A. N. p. 58
- 82 *War of the Jews* - Josephus 2.14.5
- 83 *Ezekiel* 9:21
- 84 *Daniel* 9:27
- 85 *Leviticus* 26:25
- 86 *Matthew* 24:7
- 87 *Deuteronomy* 28:49
- 88 *Hosea* 8:1
- 89 *Daniel* 9:26
- 90 *Deuteronomy* 28:51
- 91 *Josephus* 5:12:3 & 5:13:4
- 92 *The Wars Of The Jews* - Josephus, 6:3:4
- 93 *Leviticus* 26:25,29
- 94 *Luke* 21:11
- 95 *Daniel* 9:26
- 96 *Isaiah* 29:6
- 97 *Josephus*, 4:4:5.
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- 104 *Isaiah* 24:6
- 105 Strong's Numbers, H776
- 106 *Deuteronomy* 4:27
- 107 *Matthew* 24:14
- 108 *Mark* 13:11
- 109 *The World Set Free* - H.G. Wells, chap. 2