Violence, Trauma, and Exodus in Early Christian Identity Formation
[WORKING DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CITE]

Kimberly B. Stratton

Carleton University

On December 2, 2015, as the Christmas season swung into full gear, a fatal shooting occurred in San Bernardino, California, at a holiday office party. Initially, it was reported that an employee of the company and his wife were responsible, but the motive remained unknown: was he a disgruntled worker? Someone reported that he had engaged in an argument with a fellow employee prior to the shooting. Still, the powerful weaponry, which included assault rifles and semiautomatic handguns, combined with tactical gear suggested that the attack was premeditated. Yet, it was treated as just another in an ever-growing list of mass shootings to plague the United States. The New York Times article that day opined: "In a year repeatedly marked by such massacres, San Bernardino joined a tragic roster that includes Charleston, S.C.; Roseburg, Ore.; and Colorado Springs, where just five days earlier a gunman killed three people and wounded nine at a Planned Parenthood clinic." President Obama used the event to call yet again for stricter gun control, saying: "The one thing we do know is that we have a pattern now of mass shootings in this country that has no parallel anywhere else in the world, and there are some steps we could take, not to eliminate every one of these mass shootings, but to improve the odds that they don't happen as frequently." Thus the event fell into a tragic but tidy category of American experience and thought: namely, mass shootings by renegade individuals. Sometimes, the shooters use violence to get attention, at other times, they are mobilized by hateful ideologies, but in every case, they are treated as "one-off" occurrences, even when they belong to a string of ideologically motivated attacks, such as violence directed at abortion providers.

All of this changed, however, when the investigation revealed that the San Bernardino shooters,Tashfeen Malik and Syed Rizwan Farook, had espoused extremist views of the Islamic variety. At that point the narrative shifted and the media quickly re-branded the attack as an act of “terrorism.” The New York Times wrote: “What began as a local police response to gunfire in San Bernardino turned into a global investigation into the deadliest terrorist assault in the United States since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.” Now, the U.S. population, and especially its politicians and pundits, could classify the event as part of the so called “war on terror.” This label and understanding mobilized entirely different sentiments, fears, and responses. Rather than calling for restrictions on gun sales or the banning of assault weapons, as happens after so-called “renegade shootings,” some politicians used the terrorism label to demand a moratorium on the immigration of Muslims. The visa screening-process underwent an inspection and overhaul and the United States’ commitment to fighting the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq intensified. One may even speculate that this event, on the eve of an election year, contributed to the xenophobic sentiments and security fears that brought Donald Trump into power.

I begin with this incident to show how the label we put on occurrences makes all the difference in the world; it frames how we look at them and determines, to a large extent, how we respond.[1] As individuals and communities we enlist categories and stories to make sense of events, especially traumatic and violent ones that tear at the fabric of society, based as it is on reciprocity, trust, and clear communication. We revert to known paradigms from our collective history and shared mythology to comprehend and mobilize responses to calamitous events ranging from mass shootings, to natural disasters, and war. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, for example, religious beliefs largely determined how the catastrophe was understood in each country. In Indonesia, the destruction signalled a call to increase religious piety and Muslim faith; in Thailand it confirmed the ephemeral nature of life and samsara.

---

1. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2010).

This paper examines similar meaning-making endeavors in the face of tragedy at the origin of Christianity. Followers of Jesus drew on existing stories to analogize and comprehend the tragic execution of their presumed messiah. Later, following the two failed revolts against Rome in 66-70CE and 132-135CE, Jews of every stripe, including those who believed in Jesus (although this group was equally diverse), employed mythic models and sacred history to provide meaning and a course of action in the wake of these catastrophic events. This paper maps out a book project I am trying to formulate on the use of myth and story to comprehend and model responses to Roman violence in Judaea. It asks how we might read familiar texts differently and gain new insight into the parallel development of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity if we focus on narrative responses to trauma, which led, eventually, to diverging identities and soteriologies. I try to forge new ground in this study (which is quite preliminary) by showing how the interpretive strategies of different Jewish groups created vastly different models of meaning in the face of Roman violence that eventually led to the so-called Parting of the Ways. Building on previous studies of this period, which locate reasons for the split primarily in theological, economic, and/or demographic factors,[2] I look at the use of myth and story for insight into the development of diverging religious systems. Specifically, I focus on the Exodus story as a key narrative. Exodus defined Jewish identity in the post exilic period; an examination of its exegetical history reveals much about changing social and political exigencies and the variety of narrative responses to them. Stories of the exodus function like a historical mirror, reflecting and refracting the views and attitudes of authors at different periods of time, revealing insights into their ideological and theological concerns.

Scholars have previously identified the Exodus as central to early Christian thinking, specifically to the development of the Eucharist and presentation of Jesus as a new Moses.[3]

---

2. Stephen Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); James D.G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, Christianity in the Making (2015).

3. J. K. Howard, “Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20, no. 3 (1967): 239–337; N.T. Wright, “New Exodus, New Inheritance: The

Those studies, however, operate largely within Christian theological frameworks that explicitly or implicitly espouse a supercessionist view that Jesus and his early followers set out to *replace* Judaism. They present Judaism as something antiquated, which needed to be fixed, and Jesus as fulfilling that divine mission:

> And it also seems that we are to see in it a double allusion, the end of the old system and the formation of something news out of this old system, resulting upon Christ's death, which has already been shown to be the fulfillment of Isa 53.7 and the original Passover. When we further note that all this takes place within the context of the Passover Feast it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the purpose of the writer at this point was to demonstrate that the coming of Christ meant the inauguration of those events that would culminate in the offering of the True Passover, events which would mark a new intrusion of God into history in a new redemptive and saving act, which would be marked by a new Passover and the death of a new Passover Victim, and, at the same time, signifying the end of the old system founded upon the old Passover-Exodus tradition.[4]

This view assumes a problem with Judaism that Jesus came to fix. The problem with such a perspective is that it projects later theological developments onto early texts. It fails to read the New Testament as a Jewish document and the majority of writings in it as Jewish attempts to make sense of tragedy and Roman violence. Following in the steps of Alan Segal and others, I attempt to read the earliest "Christian" writings as entirely Jewish texts and to read them alongside other texts produced by other Jewish groups. This approach, I propose, can illuminate both the emergence of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism by seeing them grow out of different responses to trauma that led to particular trajectories in contrast to other possible interpretive responses that could have been taken. In other words, strategies of reading Exodus to buttress the

Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8," in *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013*, N.T. Wright (Minneapolis: MN Fortress Press c, 2013), 160–68;

4. Howard, "Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," 333.

trauma of conquest reflected and, in turn, contributed to shaping the developmental trajectory of what become Judaism and Christianity.

Trauma and Collective Identity

Before looking at our texts, it is important to consider the effects of trauma on communities and how it shapes memory and collective identity, changing society in large and small ways. Arthur Neal has studied the effects of trauma on the American psyche and discovers that trauma has a number of long lasting effects: It renders victims of violence baffled and broken, fumbling to reconstruct a sense of order and meaning in a chaotic and dangerous world.[5] As a consequence, trauma can produce a radical break with prior systems and ways of viewing the world; a new order is demanded, one that will prevent such catastrophic events from occurring in the future.[6] Thus, it can lead to the formation of new social systems. In the process of reconstruction and meaning-making, however, disagreements and differences arise within a society that may lead to sharp and irreconcilable divisions. Previously existing social fissures can undergo an ultimate breach from the strain of trauma and its aftermath. Neal points to the sharp divisions in American society that emerged during the Vietnam war and following 9/11 as recent examples.[7] Similar fissures, I argue, appear in the wake of the Judaeo-Roman wars and contribute significantly to the divergence of what eventually become Christianity and Judaism.[8]

Furthermore, traumas become ingrained in collective memories; nearly every adult of a certain age can vividly remember the events of 9/11, or where they were when Kennedy was

----

5. Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 3.
6. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience*, 18.
7. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience*, xi.
8. Diversity and plurality characterize incipient Christianity as well as Judaism in this period (as reflected in the voluminous heresiological literature). I prefer to think of diverging interpretive communities at this time, reading the same sacred texts in different ways to comprehend and address the grief and trauma following the two failed revolts and Rome's brutal suppression of Judaea.

shot. These shocking events are inscribed in the collective psyche; through memorialization they become part of the social heritage that is passed down to successive generations.[9] Neal notes that part of the process of coming to terms with trauma involves making it comprehensible. This often entails reducing complex circumstances and factors to simple and coherent narratives that emphasize dualistic oppositions between good and evil, us and them, and frequently lead to the rise of moral reform movements and an impulse to purge evil from society. This dynamic appears in virtually all ancient documents that reference the Roman wars; they draw on mythic paradigms to simplify the narrative into dualistic frameworks of good against evil.

Dominic LaCapra reveals the compulsive power of trauma: collective suffering can be so catastrophic that it marks a community forever. Members find it difficult to move past the event; they may even feel compelled to relive and recreate it because it is so central to their collective identity and because guilt holds them back from forgetting their deceased loved ones and moving forward.[10]

> Even extremely destructive and disorienting events, such as the Holocaust or the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, may become occasions of negative sublimity or displaced sacralization. They may give rise to what may be termed founding traumas—traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group rather than events that pose the problematic question of identity.[11]

In other words, identity forms precisely around the traumatic event and as a result, it becomes an essential element of the group's sacred narrative. This phenomenon lies at the heart

---

9. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience*, 4.
10. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Parallax. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 22.
11. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 23.

of the sacralization of Jesus as the Sacrificed Lamb and the subsequent valorization of martyrdom as *imitatio dei*. Suffering and sacrifice, consequently, form central tenets of Christian identity that recur in various contexts and guises throughout history, even as recently as 1999 with the sanctification of teenage victims of the Columbine shooting.[12]

Maurice Halbwachs pioneered the concept of collective memory, which explains how personal memories are given context and preserved for us by socially constructed and shared frameworks. Individual experiences and events acquire meaning and are preserved to the extent that they become part of the warp and woof of a collective story. Following Halbwachs, numerous scholars have developed and refined the notion of collective memory; they focus specifically on the ways in which memories are preserved and transmitted across generations, becoming integral parts of the cultural story that shape collective identity. Jan Assman, for example, argues that after three generations, recollection of an event either disappears from the collective memory because it is no longer relevant, or it becomes deliberately preserved in the collective imagination through stories, rituals, and memorial celebrations. These cultural artifacts enable each generation to reimagine and reexperience an event, keeping it alive. Thus Passover preserves the "memory" of Exodus and the Eucharist preserves the memory of Jesus's martyrdom.[13]

Memory theory contributes significantly to understanding the enduring impact of trauma and its role in shaping a society. Most importantly, memory theorists reveal that memories are not straightforward repositories of images and impressions called up from a mental archive somewhere in the brain, but are thoroughly shaped and determined by existing mental structures provided by society. In other words, we recall events according to patterns (known as schemata) that shape how an event is remembered. Schemata may even determine how an event

---

12. Misty Bernall, *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, foreword by Madeleine L'Engle (Farmington: Pa. Plough, 2002).

13. I put memory in quotation marks for Exodus because archaeological evidence indicates there is no historical basis for this story. No doubt some slaves escaped and conceived it to be a miraculous redemption, but the story was subsequently transformed into a national narrative of liberation and conquest on a grand scale that cannot be supported.

is perceived in the actual moment or, at least, as soon after as the person is able to reflect upon it.[14] Schemata provide the mental scaffolding that enables memory. Cultural stories, especially foundation myths that confer meaning and identity on a group by narrating its distinctive origins, come readily into play to "make sense" of the chaos and suffering of traumatic experiences. They provide the schemata that anchor and shape future memories along familiar lines. Thus, in the act of remembering an event, it is made to conform in some way to these existing patterns. As we saw with the San Bernardino shooting, it either belongs to the pattern of renegade mass shootings, or it belongs to the war on terror. In either case, it needs to be categorized to fit into the proper memory slot and be available for recall. Exodus plays that role for Jews—it provided a model for comprehending and maintaining faith during the Babylonian exile and subsequent conquests and occupations. It also provided the template for interpreting Jesus's execution, shaping the way Christian identity and theology developed in its aftermath.

The centrality of sacred story for memory, memorializing, and collective-identity formation in the wake of trauma cannot be underestimated as anthropologist, Michael Jackson, reveals: he describes the existential importance of stories, not only for anchoring us in a meaningful cosmos, but for enabling individuals to find power and healing in the act of narrating:

> The most compelling human need is to *imagine* that one's life belongs to a matrix greater than oneself, and that within this sphere of greater Being one's own actions and words matter and make a difference.[15]
>
> Storytelling is a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live these

----

14. Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Varieties of Cultural History*, Peter Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 49.
15. Michael Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 14.

events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination.[16]

It is with these insights that I wish to consider the importance of Exodus in Jewish responses to Roman violence. As we have seen, trauma dramatically ruptures the social fabric; it imprints itself on the collective memory, but does so through the filter of pre-existing stories, or schemata, that help organize and make sense of an event; the process of story-telling is a healing one and enables a group to rework their experiences in an empowering way. To remember catastrophe, not as passive victims, but as empowered subjects, constitutes the significant healing power of storytelling.

Exodus through the ages

Ironically, despite the central importance of Exodus in the biblical narrative, material evidence indicates that the story of an enslaved people, fleeing Egypt through divine intervention, and conquering the inhabited cities of Canaan to establish their own nation has little to no support archaeologically.[17] Rather, it appears that ancient Israelites were Canaanites, who adopted the worship of YHWH, and developed a distinctive ideology and identity founded upon aniconic monotheism.[18] Yet, the *story* of the Exodus assumes primary importance for Judean self-understanding, both within the biblical canon, and subsequently, in post-exilic, Hellenistic, and rabbinic writings. A pressing question arises: why and how did a quasi-fictional story of national enslavement and liberation become so central to this ancient people's self-conception? It

---

16. Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*, 15.
17. Some aspects of the exodus story do find corroboration, such as general Egyptian oppression, the selling of slaves from Canaan to Egypt, and the rise of a Semitic dynasty, known as Hyksos. Ronald Stephen Hendel, "Exodus: A Book of Memories," *Bible Review* 18, no. 4 (2002): 43 and passim.
18. Elizabeth Block-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel's History," *JBL* 122, no. 3 (2003): 425.

provided a foundation narrative, reinforced through ritual performance, that explained their special relationship to YHWH and justified the singular devotion he demanded, distinguishing Jews from their neighbors forever after.

References to the Exodus story appear in every stratum of the Hebrew bible (from the Pentateuch to Prophets and Psalms)[19] yet there is some evidence that it did not always function as the cardinal national narrative; while it comprises the central foundational event in the Deuteronomic History—Deuteronomy even claims Exodus, rather than creation, as the rationale for observing the sabbath—the author of Chronicles fails to mention it at all, and other national narratives, such as the David-Zion myth (which links Jerusalem's sanctity to God's promise to king David), competed in importance throughout the biblical era.[20] During the Babylonian exile, with the rewriting/consolidating of Israelite history and tradition under the Deuteronomic and Priestly redactors, Exodus became firmly entrenched in the collective psyche: it was identified as the origin of the nation, the source of divine law, and model of divine redemption.[21] In the wake of the Babylonian conquest, for example, Jeremiah uses Exodus as a model for liberation when he states:

> Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,"[15] but "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and

----

19. Hendel, "Exodus: A Book of Memories," 38; Peter Machinist, "Outsiders or Insiders: The Biblical View of Emergent Israel and Its Contexts," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, eds. Laurence J. Silverstein and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 41; Alan J. Avery-Peck, "The Exodus in Jewish Faith; the Problem of God's Intervention in History," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 1, no. 1 (1998): 6.

20. Pamela Barmash, "Reimagining Exile Through the Lens of Exodus," in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile*, ed. John Ahn and Jill Anne Middlemas (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 97.

21. Barmash, "Reimagining Exile," 104; Jeremiah (16.14-15 = 23.7-8), Second Isaiah (48.20; 51.9-11; 52.4), and Ezra-Nehemiah all employ Exodus as a model for the redemption of Israel from Babylonian captivity.

out of all the lands where he had driven them." For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors. (Jer 16:14)[22]

In the post-exilic period, Exodus continued to play an important role in the formulation of Judean self-identity.[23] For Jews in the Diaspora the Exodus story figured prominently in defining their identity vis-à-vis their gentile neighbors; it explained their national origins and religious differences through a powerful narrative about fortitude and divine selection.[24] Often it was enlisted to demonstrate Jewish virtue in ways commensurate with gentile values, thereby concretizing Jewish *belonging* rather than Jewish distinction**.**[25]

----

22. Biblical translations follow the NRSV unless otherwise stated. All other translations are my own.

23. Jubilees, for example, divides history into seven-year periods or "weeks of years," seven of which culminate in a Jubilee; according to the book's chronology, exodus occurred in the 49th Jubilee, marking the end of an era in world history (48.13). See O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judaeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 2 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985), 39. The book concludes with divine commandments for celebrating the Passover sacrifice, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the sabbath, indicating the significance of these ritual observances for the author and his community. Observance of the Paschal sacrifice, furthermore serves to concretize collective identity for the author of Jubilees; beyond memorializing the Passover and deliverance from Egypt, it distinguishes those Israelites who obey God from the ones who do not, preserving the former from plague while abandoning the latter to ill-treatment by Mastema (49.9, 15). See Cana Werman, "Narrative in the Service of Halakha: Abraham, Prince Mastema, and the Paschal Offering in *Jubilees*," in *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures*, ed. Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie, and Nili Wazana (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 12.

24. Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 242, and passim, emphasizes the mostly positive attitude and experience of diaspora Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Jews living abroad were able to maintain allegiance to Jerusalem as their *patris* and intend to remain in "exile" without any sense of shame or derogation of their status. While introducing necessary complexity into the discussion, it seems to me that he protests a bit too much; instances of persecution, pogroms, and anti-Jewish sentiment should not be so easily dismissed. Clearly they represent a sentiment that circulated widely, and only sometimes surfaced in what Gruen argues are isolated events. The events may be isolated, but in order to occur, the sentiment must have been percolating under the surface.

25. Philo portrays the Israelites in ways consonant with Greek notions of virtue and honor. Drawing on the language of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Philo describes Moses's extraordinary self-control: "through self-restraint (*sophrosyne*) and steadfast patience, like one holding onto the reigns of a horse, [Moses] held back his passions from surging forward" (*Vit. Mos*. 1.26). In contrast to his presentation of Moses as a virtuous and self-controlled law-giver/philosopher, Philo portrays Egyptians as cruel, intemperate, and bestial, conforming to denigrating barbarian stereotypes that circulated in Greece, especially Athens, following the Persian wars (*Vit. Mos*.

Philo, for example, presents the Israelites as suppliants in Egypt, sojourners who sought to be citizens and good neighbors (34-36). The Egyptians, thus, violated a central code of Greek honor when they forcibly enslaved Israel and killed the male children: suppliants in Greek tradition have a sacred and protected status guaranteed by Zeus.[26] Philo, thus, frames the Exodus in terms recognizable to a Hellenized audience: like Greece's own history, it is the story of a noble and virtuous people oppressed by a vindictive barbarian tyrant. Unlike the biblical narrative, however, Philo presents all Egyptians as cruel and vindictive, not just Pharaoh whose heart God deliberately hardens in the bible (Ex 7.13, 14. 22; 8.15, 19, 32; 9.7, 12, 34, 35; 10.1, 20, 27; 11.10; 14.8). In fact, this is a significant deviation from the biblical story; God never hardens Pharaoh's heart in Philo's version of the tale. Rather, Pharaoh's intransigent and self-destructive willfulness derive entirely from his own flawed nature. This change to the story, which appears in other Hellenistic versions of Exodus, appears to reflect discomfort with God's apparent injustice in the biblical account,[27] and is an attempt to bring the Hebrew god into alignment with Hellenistic values and philosophical ideals.

During the Roman period the Exodus narrative and Passover carried special significance for national identity; the festival of Passover often provided a flashpoint for political insurrection

1.43). See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Josephus's retelling of the exodus similarly addresses contemporary concerns of his time. Like Philo, Josephus presents the Egyptians as entirely culpable. They afflict the Israelites with hard labour out of malice, envy and greed: drawing again on Greek stereotypes of barbarians (*Ant*. 2.201). Josephus also strives to present an idealized Moses, whom he portrays as exceedingly beautiful and precocious. Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Moses," *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 82, no. 3/4 (January-April 1992): 285–328, carefully documents Hellenistic and Roman influences on Josephus's presentation of Moses as well as parallels with rabbinic and Samaritan sources.

26. Aeschylus *Suppl*. 1. Leon Golden, "Zeus the Protector and Zeus the Destroyer," *Classical Philology* 57, no. 1 (January 1962): 20.

27. There is no reference to God's hardening Pharoah's heart in extant fragments of Ezekiel's *Exagoge*. Like Philo, Josephus's *Antiquities* (2.9, 2.14) emphasizes the evil character of the Egyptians. God does not harden Pharoah's heart; Pharoah himself persists in being stubborn and cruel. James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 316.

during the period leading up to and culminating in the destruction of the temple.[28] While Jewish pilgrimage festivals in general created opportunities for violent conflict among Jews as well as between Jews and Romans—as different groups contested over competing views of how Judaism ought to be[29]—the narrative of divine liberation from Egypt seems to have galvanized hope for a second redemption, this time from Rome. Sources indicate that joyous celebration, feasting, and praising God for liberation from Egypt characterized the holiday during the Second-Temple period.[30]Observance of this festival, thus, performed powerful memory work by inscribing the experience of the Exodus in the body of participants through prayer, drink, and food, making the oppression and liberation tangible. This type of memorializing, however, can fuel further outbreaks of conflict and aggression, which appears to be the case in Roman Judaea: Josephus links Passover, insurrection, and rebellion against Rome in the outbreak of the Jewish war (*Ant*. 14.21; *J.W*. 2.10; *Ant*. 17.213). Passover and the Exodus story seem to have contributed to precipitating the devastating rebellion. If so, this demonstrates both the story's power to make meaning out of oppression as well as to translate hope of divine intervention into armed rebellion, perpetuating cycles of violence as fuel for collective memory making.

Responding to Roman Violence

What happens to the Exodus story following the destruction of the second Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE is of particular interest to me since I am convinced that using it as a lens on the

----

28. Josephus refers to political upheavals that occurred at Passover during the Hellenistic and Roman period (*Ant*. 14.21; *J.W*. 2.10; *Ant*. 17.213). Additionally, he states that Roman guards were always stationed at the temple to prevent insurrection during the Passover holiday, indicating the precariousness of the situation as perceived by Rome (*J.W*. 2.222; *Ant*. 20.107). Federico M. Colautti, *Passover in the Works of Josephus*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 75 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002), 109. Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 80–84, describes the experience of communitas and national identity during the pre-70 celebrations of Passover as well as the Mishnah's attempt to compensate and create an equally powerful national ceremony in the wake of the Temple's destruction.

29. Steven Weitzman, "From Feasts into Mourning: The Violence of Early Jewish Festivals," *The Journal of Religion*, 79, no. 4 (1999): 545-565.

30. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 19–25.

events can shed light on people's reactions to what transpired and to the formulation of what become rabbinic Judaism and Christianity eventually. The boundaries between the two communities were still too fluid and porous to speak of Judaism or Christianity as distinct entities or to presume that the ideals, conceptions, theologies, and ideologies that define these religions at a later date did so at this time.[31] Rather, using Exodus as a framing device helps bring the varieties, multiplicities, and competing ideologies into focus.

While certainly, identities emerge out of the complex process of defining fundamental ideas about God, the messiah, the meaning of Roman violence, and proper responses to it, "identities" is also too static of a concept. It suggests that people *have* an identity rather than that identification is an ongoing process and that one continually shapes ones *sense* of identity vis-à-vis other people and events through, among other things, the stories that we tell. These stories, however, are also not static; the way they are employed and the meaning they impart changes considerably over time and from context to context. The Exodus story lent itself readily to the ongoing process of identification in the wake of the Judaeo-Roman wars and helped formulate, reify, and reinforce starkly different interpretations that contributed significantly (although not exclusively) to the eventual separation of Judaism and Christianity into distinct and often hostile religious communities. I begin with the first relevant and enduring memory of Roman violence (for our purposes at least): the crucifixion of Jesus. It predates the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion by approximately 33 years, but occurred in the context of simmering resentment, resistance, and eschatological anticipation that precipitated the outbreak of war in 66 CE.

---

31. Stephen Wilson, *Strangers*. Daniel Boyarin, "Martyrdom and the Making of Judaism and Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 590: "through the medium of the legend, the Rabbis are, as they do so often, teaching us something of the complexities of their world and their worldview. They are, we might say, both recognizing and denying at one and the same time that Christians are us, both marking out the virtual identity between themselves and the Christians in their world at the same time that they are very actively seeking to establish difference."

Exodus and Jesus's Execution

In the decades leading up to the first Jewish rebellion and destruction of the Second Temple, messianic expectations were on the rise. This is evident from Jewish writings discovered near the Dead Sea at Qumran, and from Josephus, who mentions a number of messianic pretenders, including Jesus, who was executed by Pontius Pilate (Ant. 18.3.3).

A number of scholars have done extensive studies on the earliest memories of Jesus's death in the primitive church and concluded that it was largely understood in the framework of a heroic martyrdom. Arthur Dewey, for example, argues that the oldest references in Q suggest that Jesus's death was initially located within the familiar pattern of deaths of Jewish prophets and hero-martyrs. Biblical and post-biblical stories of the persecution and vindication of "an innocent one" provide schemata (or a memory framework) for understanding and remembering Jesus's crucifixion.[32] Alan Kirk arrives at a similar assessment: Jesus's death in Q is analogized to the deaths of Abel, Zechariah and the prophets (who were all innocent); the purpose is not only to give meaning to Jesus's degrading execution, but to invert its social and political meaning by presenting Jesus as innocent and his killers as guilty.[33] None of these studies discuss the redemptive aspect of a hero's death, although Jan Willem Van Henten's ground-breaking work on the Maccabean Martyr tradition in Judaism, shows that there was a conception of noble death or atoning death among Jews in the Hellenistic period and this almost certainly influenced early conceptions of Jesus's crucifixion as soteriological.[34]

The understanding of Jesus's death in terms of Exodus or the paschal lamb does not figure in these studies, which may suggest that it was not the earliest model for interpreting

----

32. Arthur J. Dewey, "The Locus for Death: Social Memory and the Passion Narratives," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 122–23.

33. Alan Kirk, "The Memory of Violence and the Death of Jesus in Q," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 198.

34. Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 57 (Leiden Brill, 1997).

Jesus's execution. Ellen Aitken identifies the importance of Exodus as a foundational narrative for earliest memories of Jesus's death, but surprisingly, in light of the centrality of the sacrificed lamb for later Christianity, this image does not figure in her study at all. Instead, Paul references Moses leading the Israelites in the desert and their sinning with the golden calf. Aitken explains that "In the context of critiquing a cultic meal gone awry, Paul cites the story of the golden calf, which is also a cultic meal gone awry."[35] Exodus thus operates here as the foundational myth, but not as the model for redemption through the blood of the sacrificed lamb.

Paul does refer to Jesus as the paschal lamb in passing when he makes an analogy between the polluting quality of sin and leaven while criticizing the Corinthians for tolerating incest in their midst (1 Cor. 5.7). In that context he admonishes the Corinthians to "clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb (τὸ πάσχα), the Messiah, has been sacrificed." This seems like an odd and loaded statement to drop without any elaboration. Nor does the allusion appear elsewhere in Paul's letters although he does develop the idea of Jesus's death being an atonement. This suggests to me that the analogy between Jesus and the paschal lamb existed early, and probably occurred quite naturally as the result of the timing of his death—each year the *Jarhzeit* of his execution would correspond with Passover, reinforcing the association and allowing it to be ritualized during the Passover seder. The similarity between πασχα and πασχειν may also have contributed to the analogy.

The absence of any developed soteriology around Paul's statement might suggest that it was largely unexplored and not the most relevant way for early Jesus-followers to think about, understand, and memorialize his brutal death. Or it may indicate just the opposite: that in fact it was among the earliest ways Jesus's disciples came to understand his death and was already well known in the churches to which Paul wrote. Ellen Aitken argues that Paul references Exodus in 1 Cor 10 to "critique a cultic meal gone awry." Indeed, I would argue that Paul could reference the Exodus story in such a homiletical way precisely because it was already well known and central

---

35. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion*, NTOA (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004), 38.

to the understanding of Jesus in the churches to which he wrote. Paul ties the soteriological events of Exodus directly to Chris in this passage:

> Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10. 1-4)

It is possible to discern allusions to baptism and the Eucharist here.[36] The eating and drinking of supernatural food and drink, from the supernatural rock, which was Christ/Messiah ties the Eucharist back to Exodus as the redemptive event par excellence. Paul's reference to cleaning out leaven in 1 Cor 5.7 reinforces this redemptive interpretation: Paul wants the Corinthians to recognize that the soteriological event has already occurred—the paschal lamb has been slaughtered and the angel of death has passed by—they are to live their lives in purity, therefore, as unleavened bread, participating in the Exodus event daily through their faith in Christ. Christ's death inaugurates their liberation just as the death of the paschal lamb inaugurated Israel's liberation from Egypt. Paul provides important evidence here for a messianic interpretation of Exodus prior to rabbinic literature, which suggests that Exodus's story of divine redemption from foreign tyranny inspired nationalist uprisings during Passover, something Josephus's account also supports but for which we lack explicit evidence.

Jesus's own (probable) eucharistic words (Mat 26.26-28; Mar 14.22-24; Luk 22.19-20; 1 Cor 11.24-25) might have provided the template for this association between his anticipated death as a martyr and the redemptive work of the paschal lamb. Although I doubt Jesus himself conceived the analogy between his martyrdom and the sacrifice of the lamb, his reference to the sacrificial blood that seals the covenant in Exod 24.8 may have contributed to that association. If

---

36. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8," 163, identifies allusions to Exodus in Romans 6-8.

the eucharistic words are original to Jesus, they imply that he conceived his imminent arrest and execution in messianic terms—as inaugurating the renewed covenant that would be founded at the end times.[37] They also connect his martyrdom and the coming messianic age to the Exodus story. These textual crumbs enticingly suggest that Jesus came to Jerusalem specifically at Passover to inaugurate the messianic age on the model of Exodus. In the aftermath of his death (which he apparently anticipated), Exodus provided the template for understanding this tragic event and enabled Jesus's followers to transform catastrophe into something inspiring and motivating. It also suggests the important role that Exodus likely played in fomenting revolt in 70 CE. What distinguishes Jesus's martyrdom from that of John the Baptist, Theudas, Alexander, and other messianic pretenders and prophets who were executed by Rome (or Herod) at that time? I suggest that it is this link to Exodus, and Passover, which gave Jesus's death special significance and allowed for its mythic interpretation and ritual memorialization. Combined, these narrative and performative strategies transformed the tragic loss of a messianic prophet into a powerful redemptive model with long-lasting implications for the history of Judaism.

[THIS SECTION ROUGHLY SKETCHES SOME IDEAS I AM EXPLORING]

The first explicit identification of Jesus and the paschal lamb occurs in the Gospel of John. In 1.29 and 1.36 John the Baptist proclaims Jesus "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Some scholars have claimed that John refers to the *tamid* sacrifice here instead of the *pascha* because the paschal sacrifice does not remove sin.[38] Nonetheless, John's heavy emphasis on Passover and the correlation of Jesus's death with the killing of the lambs point to the author's desire to identify Jesus with the paschal sacrifice.[39] John may be combining ideas here or it may be, as some have argued, that any sacrifice at this time was regarded as

----

37. This is not a rejection of Judaism or the call for a new covenant to replace Torah, but a fulfillment of messianic expectations that are central to Judaism's own expectations and self-identity as God's chosen people. Which is not to say that Jesus and his followers did not quibble with other Jews over legal minutia and scriptural interpretation—both of which constitute activities central to the enterprise of rabbinic Judaism.

38. Clemens Leonhard, review of in *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 33.

39. Howard, "Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," 331–32.

atoning to some degree.[40][41] The final clue occurs in John 19.36 when John cites as his prooftext: "For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of Him shall be broken'" (John 19.36), referencing Exodus 12.46 in regard to preparation of the paschal sacrifice. The fourth gospel, thus, provides evidence that in the decades following the destruction of the Second Temple, the identification of Jesus with the paschal lamb, alluded to by Paul, had begun to supplant earlier interpretations of the crucifixion as merely a martyr's death, at least among some Jews. I use the term Jew here advisedly to designate John's community; they appear to have been, and still want to be, welcomed in their local synagogue. For these Jews, it seems, believing that Jesus is the incarnate *logos* and paschal lamb, whose death redeemed them from slavery to demonic forces controlling this world, did not violate their Jewish faith. Instead, John's gospel offers rich evidence for the diversity of Jewish ideas and doctrines during the Second Temple period, some of which are buttressed by evidence from Philo, esoteric writings, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Revelation takes the idea even further with vivid and grotesque imagery of a bloodied lamb residing in the heavenly court. John's Apocalypse identifies Jesus as the Lamb twenty-seven times; it constitutes the dominant image and title for the resurrected Christ in this text. Furthermore, John combines the idea of Jesus's sacrifice with the image of an apocalyptic warrior hero, whose eschatological return vindicates martyrs and punishes their oppressors as well as leaders of other churches with whom John disagrees. The lamb as an image and concept plays a more central role for John's Apocalypse than it does in any other New Testament text.[42]

----

40. Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 40.

41. J. K. Howard, "Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20, no. 3 (1967): 332; Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 40Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 40.

42. Revelation draws on schemata from Isaiah and Jeremiah as well as from Exodus, so it is possible the author understands Jesus as the innocent lambs identified with persecuted prophets and the suffering servant of Isaiah (53). Most likely the two ideas have already been assimilated to each other.

Around the time the Apocalypse of John was composed (probably in the late 90's CE, although earlier dates have been proposed), other early Christian writers present Jesus's death as sacrificial, suggesting that this idea was increasingly gaining ground at the end of the first century. 1 Peter explicitly states: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (1:18). Here Jesus's sacrificial death is compared to a lamb's, although he is not explicitly identified as the lamb himself.

Hebrews portrays Jesus as a High Priest, whose own blood constitutes the purifying sacrifice for his people. While not described as a lamb in Hebrews, the theme of Jesus's redemptive sacrifice dominates this text as it does 1 Peter.[43] So, from what this survey indicates, early followers of Jesus, in the first and early second centuries, shifted their understanding of his death from that of a heroic martyrdom to a redemptive sacrifice. The identification of Jesus with the paschal lamb occurs fairly early, in Paul, and indicates that the Exodus story of liberation from slavery and foreign domination played a primary role in comprehending and interpreting Jesus's death, especially as the passage of time gave room for reflection and mythic elaboration. This explanation gained traction in the years following 70CE, I suggest, because it also helped respond to the demise of the Second Temple and the consequent loss of Israel's sacred cult site. With the destruction of the Temple Jews could no longer make atoning sacrifices, a problem that required remediation. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai promoted deeds of loving kindness as a replacement. Other Jews, who already saw Jesus's death as a redemptive sacrifice, found solace for the events of 70CE in promoting his crucifixion as the final sacrifice to replace all sacrifices. The supercessionist reading of Jesus's atoning sacrifice misses its obvious link to historical context: the idea emerges in response to the loss of the temple and emphasizes a train of thought

---

43. Both texts appear to respond to situations of persecution and encourage fortitude in the face of suffering.

that had already developed decades earlier to comprehend and memorialize Jesus's death during Passover. It was intended as a solution for Jews, not a replacement for Judaism.

Babylon Between the Wars

Unfortunately, there is no rabbinic literature from the period before the Bar Kochba revolt. The first volume of rabbinic writing, the Mishnah, was redacted around 216CE; it is an apodictic collection of Jewish law without exegetical elaboration (midrash). Although we do not have texts produced during this period, later rabbinic writings refer to it and give us a sense of what rabbis were doing or, at least, what their disciples a century later thought they were doing (or wanted them to do). Rabbinic literature is based on oral tradition and scholars have, until fairly recently, accepted both the attributions and their statements largely at face value. This has mostly changed, but puts the historian in a bit of a bind. Without corroborating evidence, how do you reconstruct the history of Judaism in this period since the primary documents were redacted centuries later and are highly polemical and mythologized? Text critical methods provide the historian with some tools to tease out relevant details from legend and pure fiction but often not much is left.

What is interesting to me is that we have a couple of Jewish writings from this period (in addition to Josephus of course) that respond to the traumatic events of 70CE. 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch are usually dated to the period after 70 CE and are understood to respond to the cataclysmic defeat of the Jewish rebellion. Both pseudepigraphies are set during the Babylonian exile and both offer prophecies of imminent redemption and return (2 Esdras 6.18-23; 2 Bar 13.3). Significantly, it is the Babylonian exile and not Exodus that provides the mythic backdrop for this response to the Roman war. Why is this significant? It has nothing to do with Exodus. Precisely! All the evidence we have from and about this period, including these two texts, references in rabbinic literature, and early Christian writings such as Mark and the book of Revelation, indicate that messianism and eschatological expectations continued to run high even

(especially) after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.[44] The Babylonian captivity provided a model for eschatological hope on a 60 to 70 year time-line[45] and, thus, we should not be surprised to see the Bar Kochba rebellion start 62 years after the fall of the Second Temple.

This section of my project is the most tentative and under construction, but I venture to propose that rabbis, followers of Jesus (most of whom still considered themselves to be Jews), and a majority of Jews in Judaea (if not the diaspora), continued to await divine intervention against Rome. The fall of Babylon (not Exodus) provided the model, as Revelation vividly attests with its explicit identification of Rome as the Whore of Babylon, drunk on the blood of martyrs. It was only with the absolute and brutal failure of the Bar Kochba revolt that both Jews and followers of Jesus began to rethink and recalibrate their eschatologies and their understanding of events. It is during this period, following the Bar Kochba revolt, that Exodus emerges again as the central model and metaphor for understanding and coping with the brutal suppression of Jewish nationalism.[46] It is in this period, following the war and largely because of it, I would argue, that certain followers of Jesus began to assert a new identity, one not only distinct from Judaism, but in opposition to it. Exodus ironically provides the mythic basis for supercessionist claims that followers of Jesus represent the true Israel, while those who reject his

----

44. Schaefer cogently argues that there was not much of a rabbinic movement during this period and the rabbis of the Yavnean period exercised very little influence. Nonetheless, the problematic and not very reliable references to Bar Kochbah suggest that his movement was messianic and may have garnered some support from rabbis, although this is unclear. (add citation info.)

45. 59 years by my reckoning elapsed between the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the beginning of rebuilding it under Cyrus the Great. Roland Deines, "How Long? God's Revealed Schedule for Salvation and the Outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," in *Judaism and Crisis: Crisis as a Catalyst in Jewish Cultural History*, ed. Armin Lange, K.F. Diethard Römheld, and Matthias Weigold, Schriften Des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum, vol. 9 (Göttingen ; Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 217–22, identifies 70 as the number of years anticipated for redemption, based on scriptural prophecies (Jer 25.11-12; 29.10-11; Dan 9.24). He also argues that the Babylonian exile provided the model for messianic expectations fueling support for Bar Kokhba.

46. It is also in this period, rather than after 70CE, that I would situate the beginning of the rabbinic movement. I do not think it is accidental that prior to 135, we have eschatological writings and after it we have rabbinic writings, focused on memorializing the temple while shifting away from nationalism and toward a temple-fee form of Judaism that survives until today.

messiahship are rejected by him. This rereading of Exodus, after Bar Kochba, not only responds to the failure of that rebellion (blaming it on the "Jews'" rejection of Jesus, but also shifts "Christian" expectations of redemption from national liberation to one that was spiritualized and universalized.

For other Jews, not invested in the meaning of Jesus's death or his delayed eschatological return, Exodus offered consolation and hope for eventual redemption. Because servitude lasted over 400 years in Exodus, this story presented an alternative model to understand, cope with, and ultimately accept prolonged occupation. It enabled rabbis to shift from hopes for imminent redemption to acceptance of Roman rule, while still maintaining faith in God and hope for an eventual liberation.

The next section examines in some depth the diverging interpretations of Exodus that emerged following Bar Kochba, and shows how in each case the story made the events of 135CE comprehensible. The disparate interpretations also show how exegetical trajectories in play since Jesus's crucifixion were amplified and sharpened to reveal significant differences in the collective identities being formed by and through the telling of this story. The legacy of these interpretations is enduring and profound.

Exodus After Bar Kochba

Following the failed revolt against Rome that lasted from 132-135CE, and resulted in the military suppression of Judaea, banning of Jewish religious practices, and exile of Jews from Judaea (renamed now Syria Palestina), Exodus was again enlisted to think about suffering and redemption.[47] Early rabbinic sages employ the Exodus story to frame the catastrophic events,

---

47. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem Contre Rome*, Patrimoines. Judaïsme, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1990), 174–82, compiles rabbinic evidence for suppression of Jewish religious practices and persecution during the period of "danger" following the revolt. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1976 [reprint 2001]), 457–66, weighs the evidence from Roman, Christian, and Jewish sources, as well as archaeology, to reconstruct the events of the war and its aftermath. Smallwood surmises that while Judaism was not outright banned, the desecration of the temple site and empire-wide prohibition of circumcision (along with castration) may have given that

console the people, and sometimes to question God. The first example I will consider derives from a discussion of the shema (Deut 6.4), a Jewish prayer recited three times daily, which was being codified at this time:

> They recall the Exodus from Egypt [in the Shema] at night. Said Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah: behold I am about seventy years old, and I have never been worthy [to understand] why you tell of the Exodus from Egypt at night until ben Zoma explained it: As it says "In order that you may remember the day you came out of Egypt all the days of you life (כל ימי חייך)" (Deut. 16.3). "Days of your life," [would indicate] the days. "*All* the days of your life" [indicates] the nights [also]. But sages say: "days of your life" [refers to] this world: "all the days of your life" includes the days of the Messiah (להביא לימות המשיח). (m. Ber. 1.5)[48]

In this mishnah, anonymous sages link recounting the Exodus from Egypt during the recital of the Shema with messianic salvation.[49] Significantly, the verb most often translated as

impression. Hadrian clearly sought to Hellenize the province of Judaea and may have discouraged distinctive Jewish practices. Drawing more heavily on rabbinic sources, Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70–640 C.E.)*, translated and edited by Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1980–84), 632–37, regards the decrees as having a more sinister intent: "to crush the national spirit of the Jews, perhaps even to put an end to their presence in Palestine as a collective entity" (632). See Werner Eck, "The Bar Kochba Revolt: The Roman Point of View," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 76–89, for an examination of evidence for the Roman experience and perception of the revolt as a grave threat. Benjamin Isaac and Aharon Oppenheimer, "The Rovolt of Bar Kokhba: Ideology and Modern Scholarship," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 1 (1985): 33–60, evaluate evidence for and scholarship on bar Kochba's revolt, including religious persecution (59). This article offers a very useful summary of sources available pre 1985. See Peter Schäfer, "Hadrian's Policy in Judaea and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: A Reassessment," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, ed. Philip R. Davies & Richard T. White, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series, vol. 100 (Sheffield: Sheffield JSOT Press, 1990), 281–303, for a different interpretation of the evidence.

48. Translations of the Mishnah are mine, based on the text of Hanoch Albeck, ed., *The Mishna* (Jerusalem: Dvir Publishing House, 1988).

49. Baruch M. Bokser, "Messianism, the Exodus Pattern, and Early Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 244, notes with surprise the Mishnah's linking of exodus

“include,” הביא, also suggests “bring about.” Thus, not only does recounting the Exodus during the Shema remind those praying of God’s former intervention and provide a paradigm for future interventions, sustaining hope and faith, but it may even help bring about the redemption anticipated with the Messianic age. Here memory, memorializing, and collective salvation appear inextricably interconnected. The future life and liberty of the community depends, very literally, on memorializing past indignation and oppression.

Many scholars have detected in rabbinic writing a shift away from armed rebellion and active striving for political sovereignty after the failed Bar Kochba rebellion. The above text’s emphasis on prayer and memorializing as a way to bring messianic intervention confirms this view. As does the Mekilta of R. Ishmael (Besh. 3.128-140), which describes four different Israelite responses to facing the Red Sea and may represent responses to the Roman conquest projected onto the Exodus narrative:[50] “One [group] said: we will fall into the sea. One said: we will return to Egypt. One said: we will make war against them; and one said: we will cry out against them.” Group one succumbs to despair and is overwhelmed; the second group also gives up but seeks accommodation and accepts slavery; group three resists and tries to fight; group four decries the injustice, perhaps seeking divine intervention. The text quotes a reply to each group that reaffirms faith in God to intercede, and emphasizes a religious rather than political or military response to persecution:

> “The Lord will fight for you.” Not only in this hour, but forever he will fight against your enemies. Rabbi Meir says, “the Lord will fight for you if you stand there and remain

with the Shema and contrasts this move with parallel passages in Mekhilta, Pisha, *Bo* 16 and SifDeut 130, which do not mention the Shema.

50. Other scholars have identified a response to Roman conquest in the Mekhilta: M. Pickup, “Eschatological Interpretation in Shirata,” *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* (1998): 85, 89; Alan Appelbaum, “Hidden Transcripts in King-Parables: Windows on Rabbinic Resistance to Rome,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17 (2010): 287–88, 300.

> silent. How much more so will the Lord fight for you if you give him praise! (Mekilta Besh. 3.137-140)"

Following R. Meir's lead, the passage continues to extol the power of prayer and worship to speed divine intercession. Thus, the Song at the Sea, which occurs in the biblical narrative *after* God's soteriological intervention to celebrate the miracle of divine intercession and salvation, is instead here the *catalyst* for it. Prayer and praise are presented in this text as the sole human actions appropriate when facing violence and oppression. Even crying out against the injustice seems to be censured. Liberation lies entirely in the hands of God.[51]

Another use of Exodus in early midrashic responses to Roman conquest proposes that suffering itself is meaningful:

> As if it were possible, Israel said to God: you have redeemed yourself. Likewise you find that in every place where Israel was exiled, the Shekinah, as it were, went into exile with them. When they were exiled in Egypt, the Shekinah went into exile with them, as it is said: "I exiled[52] myself to the house of your fathers when they were in Egypt" (1 Sam. 2.27). When they were exiled to Babylon, Shekinah went into exile with them, as it is said: "For your sake I sent myself[53] to Babylon" (Isa 43.14). When they were exiled to Elam, the Shekinah went into exile with them, as it is said: "I will set my throne in Elam" (Jer 49.38). When they were exiled to Edom, the Shekinah went into exile with them, as it is said: "Who is this that comes from Edom," etc. (Isa. 63.1). And when they return in

---

51. Other passages make Israel's salvation contingent on good deeds and study of Torah. For example, in a parallel text from the Jerusalem Talmud that describes God's descent into exile with Israel, redemption is tied to repentance: R. Aha in the name of R. Tanhum b. R. Hiyya: "If Israel were to repent for one day, immediately the son of David would come." What is the scriptural proof? "Today, if you would listen to his voice." (Ps. 95.7). Said R. Levi, "If Israel would observe a single Sabbath properly, immediately, the son of David would come" (y. Taanit 1.1). Proper ritual observance in this quotation achieves political liberation.
52. The *Mekhilta* reads הנגלה נגליתי as "exiled" rather than "revealed."
53. The text reads שלחתי as pual.

the future, the Shekinah, as it were, will return with them, as it is said: “And the Lord your God will return [with][54] your captivity” (Deut. 30.1) (Mekilta, Pisha 14, 98-107)

This passage significantly lists the final exile before the future messianic liberation as Edom.[55] Edom/Essau have long been recognized as code for Rome in rabbinic writings (e.g., b. Gittin 57b).[56] Here we see that Exodus provides not only the opportunity to explore suffering and divine participation in it, but serves as a model for all exiles and redemptions, including most importantly, the one sages experienced themselves—Roman occupation and colonization of Judaea. The fact that God’s spiritual presence is said to participate in Israel’s suffering mitigates the feeling of abandonment and helplessness many people must have felt. It provides spiritual meaning and divine proximity, presenting the current situation as a kind of *askesis*, making the pain not only meaningful but necessary for spiritual perfection. Implicit in this midrash is an expectation that vindication will come eventually, but the focus shifts from needing or even desiring liberation to appreciating the present moment as divinely sanctioned and shared.[57]

The above midrashim all provide positive responses to Roman occupation that affirm patience, hope, and meaning in the wake of trauma. The next passage also addresses suffering and Roman occupation but derives from the Babylonian Talmud and reveals a much later stage of reflection—one that can accommodate complexity, nuance, and even divine inscrutability and lack of meaning. In this text, God grants Moses a glimpse of Rabbi Akiba, in the future, expounding on the Torah to his disciples; Moses feels overwhelmed by the sophistication of Akiba’s argumentation and asks God to see the reward for his mastery:

----

54. The text deliberately misreads the direct object signifier (את) as “with.”
55. This version of the midrash appears verbatim in Sifre Numbers 161.5, where it is attributed to Rabbi Natan. Avery-Peck, “Exodus in Jewish Faith,” 15–16, similarly discusses God’s suffering with the people, but in reference to a different text (b. Ber 59a).
56. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, “Jacob et Esaü ou Israël et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 201, no. 4 (1984): 369–92. See, e.g., y. Avod Zara 1.2 where Rome and Essau are explicitly identified.
57. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134–42, discusses this text at length.

> "Master of the World, you showed me his Torah, [now] show me his reward." He [God] said to him: turn around [look behind you]. He turned [to look] behind himself and saw them weighing his [Akiba's] flesh in the meat-market. He [Moses] said to him, "Master of the World: this Torah [merits] this reward?" He [God] said to him, "Silence! That is how I conceived my plan." (b. Men. 29b).

Alan Avery-Peck identifies in this story a rabbinic response to god's failure to intervene in the Roman war and deliver Israel with miracles as he did in the Exodus. The text proposes that god's will may include unfair suffering and that he is inscrutable; God will not reveal himself. Avery-Peck concludes that "the stage of human events thus has no humanly discernible meaning, and cannot be used as a path to comprehend God or God's will."[58]This anomic answer, however, does not surface in the earlier midrashim, as far as I have seen. Rather, tannaitic texts strive to reaffirm coherence and faith in divine agency and purpose.

The final two passages I will quote from rabbinic literature employ the Exodus narrative to construct identity through opposition with an Other. In the majority of rabbinic texts that cite Exodus, identity maintenance occurs in two ways: 1) by rehearsing biblical Israel's victimage and suffering, drawing the group together around the shared memory of oppression, and 2) collective *schadenfreude* at witnessing divine vengeance and vindication against Israel's enemies. In both cases stories of historic violence draw boundaries around those who identify with biblical Israel, and reinforce collective identity around the self perception promulgated by those stories: namely, we are the people who suffered at the hands of Egypt but eventually witnessed our vindication through divine punishments inflicted on our oppressors. These two components of the Exodus story operate side by side in many midrashim. While stories of ancestral conflicts frequently define contemporary self understanding, as Bruce Lincoln

----

58. Avery-Peck, "Exodus in Jewish Faith," 14.

demonstrates, these midrashim also release tension built up against Rome by venting anger at those who oppress Israel and by predicting divine judgment for *all* of Israel's enemies. Some texts explicitly link Egypt and Rome as the targets of divine recompense as in this passage from the Mechilta de Rabbi Ishmael :

> As soon as Israel saw the angelic minister of the nation [of Egypt] falling, they began giving praise. Thus it is said "he cast him down" (רמה) and furthermore you derive that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will not in the future exact punishment from the nations until He exacts punishment from their ministering angels. As it is said: "it shall happen on that day, the LORD will punish the heavenly army in heaven, and afterward the kings of the earth on earth" (Isa. 24.21) [. . .] And it says, "For my sword has satiated itself in heaven" and after that "Behold, upon Edom it shall fall (Isa. 34.5). (Mechilta deshira 2.111-119)

This passage draws on a familiar idea in early Judaism, namely, that the battles waged on earth mirror those waged in heaven between angelic representatives of different nations.[59] Victory or defeat occurs in heaven first according to divine determination. The fall of Egypt's angel in this passage garners Israel's praise because it presages the fall of Pharaoh and the liberation of God's people. The prooftexts cited from Isaiah shift emphasis from Egypt, the apparent topic of the midrash, to Rome, equated here with Edom. Interestingly, as with many similar texts, the reference to Edom occurs in the *future* tense, indicating that this final redemption has not yet occurred; the midrash itself functions to shore up faith in God's eventual intervention. By encouraging hope for divine redemption and vengeance against "Edom," this passage constitutes a subversive discourse that sabotages Roman authority and challenges

---

59. This notion appears in Dan 10.13, 20, and later in rabbinic literature: e.g., Lev Rab 29.2.

Roman rule without confrontation or conflict. Through such textual strategies, sages inculcated an oppositional identity that resisted Roman cultural imperialism without further bloodshed.

The final rabbinic quotation showcases the use of mythic schemata to reify social boundaries and collective identity.

> R. Yosi the Galilean says, "when Israel came up from the sea and saw their enemies' dead/dying corpses (אויביהם פגרים מתים) lying along the edge of the sea, everyone broke into song: the nursing child lying on his mother's lap and the infant suckling from his mother's breast. When they saw the Shechinah (divine presence) the nursing child raised his neck and the infant released his mouth from his mother's breast and everyone responded in song, and said "this is my god and I will praise him" (Ex. 15.2). Rabbi Meir says, even embryos in the wombs of their mothers sang the song, as it is said: "bless God in the assemblies, [YHWH] the fountain of Israel" (Psalm 68.26). And the infant let go the nipple from his mouth and sang the song, as it is said: "from the mouths of babes and infants. . . " (Ps. 8.2). (t. Sotah 6.4).

This passage from the Tosefta powerfully demonstrates the role memorializing violence plays in collective identity formation. First the impulse to praise God with song and acclamation occurs at the sight of dead and dying bodies.[60] Notwithstanding that the Egyptians had just been pursuing Israel with the intention of killing or re-enslaving them, the opposition of us and them is vividly portrayed in the resounding joy at seeing their corpses strewn across the edge of the

----

60. Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, translated from the Hebrew by Baruch J. Schwartz, Publication of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1992), 236–37, interestingly points out that a "considerable number of biblical texts" refer to the parting of the sea, but fail to mention Egyptian casualties. Instead, "God is to be held in awe for His acts not because He vanquished the Egyptians but because He turned the sea into dry land!" He links this emphasis to cosmogonic myths about God defeating Yam. I suggest that the emphasis in our text on viewing dead bodies of the Egyptians mimics and inverts the prevalent use of violent spectacle by Rome to intimidate and control subject populations.

sea. The voyeuristic delight at Egyptian death reveals the changed power relationship between Israel and her former oppressor.

Looking at, gazing, is a politically charged act.[61] Who has the right to look at another, to posses her visually? The power differential implied by the gaze is amplified in situations of disgrace and suffering. As Susan Sontag so compellingly discusses in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the display of death and suffering is something reserved for the Other, for our enemies, or exotic peoples whose lives seem remote from our own.[62] Gazing at the dead Egyptians, witnessing their suffering, highlights the distinction between us and them that the Exodus narrative already brings to the fore. What is most revealing in this passage is that even the tiniest baby, still sucking his mother's breast, and foetuses in their mothers' wombs join in the acclamation. The sight of Egyptian death thus unites the community in the broadest sense of the term. Even those too young to understand or to see participate in the identity forming moment, when Israel realizes through gazing at the death of others its transformation from slave to free.

These passages demonstrate the variety of work that exegeses of Exodus performed in response to Roman violence: the story of prolonged slavery and eventual redemption modeled patient endurance, gave meaning to suffering, and facilitated boundary drawing. It thus gave the community resilience to Roman occupation and enabled some Jews to maintain Jewish identity even when the center of their religious identity, ritual life, and history was obliterated. Furthermore, these hidden discourses of resistance offered a peaceful means by which Jews could continue to resist Roman cultural hegemony despite superficial compliance.

Exodus in Justin and Melito

---

61. Simon Goldhill, "The Erotic Eye: Visual Stimulation and Cultural Conflict," in *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 154–94.

62. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 70–73.

Interestingly, around the same time, in the mid-second century, writers who espouse the Christian faith drew on the Exodus narrative to criticize Jews, blame them for the death of Jesus, and explain the failed Bar Kochba revolt. The first two chapters of 2 Esdras, dated to this period and attributed to a Christian author, draw on Exodus as a mythic context for God's rejection of his stubborn and disobedient people. In approximately 155CE (20 years after the conclusion of the war) Justin uses Exodus and the Passover lamb as proof that Jesus is the anticipated messiah in his dialogue with Trypho:

> And that sheep (πρόβατον), commanded to be roasted whole, was a symbol of the suffering of the cross, which Christ was destined to undergo (πάσχειν). For the roasted sheep is roasted in a position resembling that of the cross; for one spike is driven through from the thighs as fas as the head, and one is transfixed across the back, to which the front feet (χεῖρες) of the sheep are attached (40.3).[63]

Justin describes the lamb as a symbol of Jesus's crucifixion, drawing on the familiar Christian method of typological interpretation, wherein biblical texts foretell the suffering and death of Jesus, thereby proving his messiahship. Justin does not mention any idea of redemption in this passage, although elsewhere, he expands on the analogy, drawing also on the timing of Jesus's death in the Gospel of John to argue that Jesus is the Passover lamb whose blood saved the Israelites from death of the first born.[64] He also repeatedly attributes the failure of the Bar

----

63. Καὶ τὸ κελευσθὲν πρόβατον ἐκεῖνο *ὀπτὸν ὅλον* γίνεσθαι τοῦ πάθους τοῦ σταυροῦ, δι' οὗ πάσχειν ἔμελλεν ὁ Χριστός, σύμβολον ἦν. Τὸ γὰρ ὀπτώμενον πρόβατον σχηματιζόμενον ὁμοίως τῷ σχήματι τοῦ σταυροῦ ὀπτᾶται· εἷς γὰρ ὄρθιος ὀβελίσκος διαπερονᾶται ἀπὸ τῶν κατωτάτω μερῶν μέχρι τῆς κεφαλῆς, καὶ εἷς πάλιν κατὰ τὸ μετάφρενον, ᾧ προσαρτῶνται καὶ αἱ χεῖρες τοῦ προβάτου.

64. Therefore our suffering and crucified Christ was not cursed by the law, but made it manifest that He alone would save those who do not depart from His faith. And the blood of the passover, sprinkled on each man's door posts and lintel, delivered those who were saved in Egypt, when the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed. For the Passover was Christ, who was afterwards sacrificed, as also Isaiah said, "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter" (53.7). And it is written, that on the day of the passover you seized Him, and that also during the passover you crucified

Kochba rebellion to punishment from God for killing Christ and argues that gentiles (the nations) have replaced Jews in the sacred city now that Rome has purged it of Jewish guilt (16, 24). Ouch! He pours salt on a still fresh wound, disenfranchising Jews from their holy land and, simultaneously, driving a wedge between Christianity (now defined as wholly gentile) and Judaism (a religion of the dispossessed).[65]

Ten to twenty years later (165-175), Melito, the bishop of Sardis, writes an extended homily on the Exodus, called the Peri Pascha, in which the themes introduced by Justin get more fully developed and their vituperative tone dramatically enhanced by the liturgical setting of the homily and Melito's finely-honed rhetorical skill. This constitutes the oldest known Easter homily[66] and the first to make the ignominious accusation that the Jews killed "God" when they sent Jesus to be executed by the Romans.[67] The Peri Pascha was immensely popular, demonstrated by widely dispersed manuscript evidence from the 3rd and 4th centuries, and almost certainly shaped the Easter liturgy Proclamation that is still in use today.[68]

Him. And as the blood of the passover saved those who were in Egypt, so also the blood of xist will deliver from death those who have believed. (111, ANF p. 254)

65. Scholars have debated whether or not this dialogue is based on a conversation with a real Jew or whether Justin is inventing the character and context as a straw man to present arguments against Marcionism, a popular form of Christianity that wholly rejected the god of the bible and use of biblical texts. My guess is that both are the case; the questions that Trypho poses seem realistic and there are clearly shout-outs to Marcion, which diverge from Trypho's concerns and the argument at hand.

66. S. G. Wilson, "Passover, Easter, and Anti-Judaism: Melito of Sardis and Others," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, literary editor Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 343.

67. Melito extends and radicalizes an argument Justin makes in his Dialogue with Trypho (100).

68. These, then, are the feasts of Passover,
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,
from slavery in Egypt
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night

Numerous scholars have explored the relationship between Melito and his Jewish neighbors in Sardis, proposing that friction stemming from proximity and a desire to establish boundaries and a separate identity explain his vituperative attack on Jews and Judaism;[69] some scholars have proposed that the Peri Pascha, was intended to be a Christian haggadah, replacing Jewish ones possibly used by Quartodecimans in Asia Minor.[70] Many of these arguments encounter problems, which I do not intend to address here. Rather, it is sufficient to recognize that Melito, like his predecessor Justin, uses the Exodus narrative to explain Jewish guilt, justify the conquest of Judaea, and present Jesus as the apotropaic lamb of Exodus. Significantly, Melito's form of Christology completely merges Christ and God. They are one and the same. There is no conception of a trinity. Hence the actions of the holy spirit in Egypt are those of Christ, who is equated with God the Father and creator. Thus, we see Melito using Exodus to present a more developed Christology and simultaneously drive a wedge between followers of Jesus and their Jewish compatriots. He is doing this exegetical work around the same time as his Jewish colleagues, the tannaim, were using Exodus to reflect on the tragic conclusion of the Bar Kochba war, explain it, and model a response to it. If Eusebius's claim that Melito travelled to Palestine is correct, we may imagine that he encountered the work of rabbinic sages there. At any rate, it is evidence that diverging interpretations of Passover contributed to tensions with some Jews and the eventual "parting of the ways," at least in certain communities.[71]

that with a pillar of fire
banished the darkness of sin.
(wikipedia)

69. A. T. Kraabel, "Melito the Bishop and the Synagogue at Sardis: Text and Context," in *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann*, ed. David Gordon Mitten, John Griffiths Pedley, and Jane Ayer Scott, Monographs in Art and Archaeology (Mainz, W. Germany: Verlag P. von Zabern, 1971), 84.

70. Others have refuted this view on the grounds that it is not similar enough and that the Passover Haggadah would not have existed yet, when Melito lived. Rather, the celebration would have entailed more extemporaneous reflection on the holiday not a set script as developed in the Medieveal period. eaddressed the relationship between Melito and the Jewish community in Sardis, attempting to show that he intended to write a Christian Haggadah to replace the Jewish haggadah, and was responding to Jewish power and prestige in his community.

71. Christian communities that maintained their Jewish identity and observances survived until at least the 4th century in certain parts of Syria and Asia Minor as indicated by the

Many of the themes and strategies we encounter in rabbinic readings of Exodus appear also in the Peri Pascha, however, the author employs them in a systematic Christological argument. My intention is not to show that Melito responds directly to specific rabbinic texts but rather to show that he may have been aware of the general tenor of those exegeses and reacts to them in a particular way informed by his understanding of Jesus as the paschal sacrifice. This interpretive key makes all the difference in the world, and contributes significantly toward the diverging of Christians and Jews following the Bar Kochba war.[72]

Previously, I cited rabbinic texts that use Exodus to model *future* messianic redemption. Melito, here presents Jesus as the messiah and redemption as already accomplished (echoing 1 Cor 5.7):

> He is the one who delivered us from slavery to freedom,
>
> From darkness to light,
>
> From death to life,
>
> From tyranny to an eternal kingdom,
>
> And made us a new priesthood,
>
> And a special people for all time.
>
> He is the pascha of our salvation.
>
> (473-479)

And further on:

Pseudo-Clementine writings. Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Parting Ways Over Blood and Water? Beyond 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' in the Roman Near East," in *La Croisée Des Chemins Revisitée*, Simon C. Mimouni and Bernard Pouderon (Paris: Cerf, 2012), 227–60; Annette Yoshiko Reed and Lilly Vuong, "Christianity in Antioch: Partings in Roman Syria," in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 105–32; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Jewish Christianity After the Parting of the Ways: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine Literature," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 188–231.

72. I use Christian advisedly here since it seems that the term and identity associated with was widely recognized by this time.

> "I am," says the Christ,
>
> "I am the one who dissolved death
>
> And triumphed over the enemy
>
> And trampled down Hades
>
> And bound the strong one
>
> And carried off man to the heights of heaven;
>
> I am he," says the Christ. (759--765)

In these passages, the messianic age still awaited by rabbinic Jews—as reflected in tannatic writings—is realized. Christ has redeemed humanity from slavery, destroyed death, and overcome tyranny.

Sages described god's feminine presence, the shekhina, going into exile with Israel and sharing in her suffering, which confers meaning and divine proximity to the experience of exile and oppression. The Peri Pascha also portrays divine suffering, but again, with a distinct Christological twist:

> This one who, coming from heaven to the earth on account of the one who suffered,
>
> And, having put on that same one through a virgin's womb,
>
> And came forth a human being,
>
> received the afflictions of the suffering one
>
> through the body that is able to suffer,
>
> and destroyed the afflictions of the flesh;
>
> and with the spirit that could not die,
>
> slayed Death, the killer of men. (451-458)

Just as the *shekhina* experiences suffering and shares in Israel's pain and trauma, Melito claims that Christ put on human flesh in order to suffer and through suffering conquered death. Suffering is again made meaningful, except in this case, suffering is not a form of *askesis* that

enables you to share an experience with the divine presence, but is soteriological in and of itself. Divine suffering conquers death.

Numerous rabbinic passages address the longing for sovereignty, often deferring it to a distant, messianic, future. The Peri Pascha implicitly critiques this nationalistic hope by attributing the conquest of Judea to divine punishment for killing Jesus:

Because, O Israel,
You did not tremble in the presence of the Lord,
You trembled from the enemy's attack;
[. . . .]
You did not lament for the Lord
So, you lamented for your first born,
When the Lord was hung up, you did not tear your clothes
So you tore your clothes over those who were slaughtered. (730-738)

Finally, in a stark description of the violence visited upon Egypt, the Peri Pascha parallels rabbinic literature by presenting a voyeuristic moment of *schadenfreude* in which collective identity is formed through witnessing an enemy's suffering. The alterity such dehumanizing violence and pain impose is revealed through the inclusion of beasts in the collective pain of Egypt on the night of Passover:

Lowing was heard in the plains of the land
From herds bitterly lamenting over their young;
A cow for her suckling calf
And horse for her foal
And the rest of the flock who had borne young and were swelling [with milk]
Were bitterly and piteously lamenting for their first-born offspring.
A loud wailing and lamentation occurred over the destruction of humans,
Over the dead first-borns there.
For all Egypt wreaked from the unburied corpses.

It was a terrible spectacle to observe:

Mothers of the Egyptians with hair loose [in mourning]

Fathers losing their minds,

In horror wailing aloud in the Egyptian tongue. (178-190)

Melito's description of the scene as a spectacle θέαμα captures well the effect of witnessing violence perpetrated against an Other. As demonstrated by Roman spectacles in arenas throughout the empire during this period, social order, collective identity, and imperial control could all be effected through the display of punitive violence. Significantly, Melito identifies the Egyptians in the Peri Pascha not with Rome, as rabbinic sages do, but with Israel! It is Israel, who plays the role of unjust aggressor and causes Christ, the paschal lamb, to suffer and die. Melito, therefore, turns rabbinic readings of Exodus on their head and enlists them in an intricate Christological argument that serves to justify and legitimize one particular understanding of Jesus, which competed with at least a few others in the second century. In so doing he also helps drive a wedge between followers of Jesus (or at least some of them) and their Jewish compatriots (at least the rabbis).

The lines between Judaism and Christianity remained fuzzy for another century or two; as late as the fourth century when John Chrysostom wrote his scathing attack, "Against Judaizers," other Christians were penning the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions that demonstrate the persistence of law-observing Christian communities, who regarded faith in Jesus and observance of Jewish mitzvot as compatible. Furthermore, Phil Harland and others have shown that for Jews in Asia Minor during the third century, being Jewish was one identification among many; the Jewish community was well integrated into Graeco-Roman society and not isolated or insular. Thus, boundary blurring worked on all sides: between Jews, gentiles, and Christians, complicating the definition of these categories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have proposed that the Exodus narrative, which gave meaning to the suffering and exile of Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BCE, and continued to serve as a myth of national origins in the post-exilic and Hellenistic periods, came to the fore again in the period following the Bar Kochba rebellion, where it offered a model of patient endurance that suited the context of dashed messianic hopes and despair following this second war with Rome. Tracing the exegetical *Nachleben* of the biblical Exodus story highlights cultural shifts and transformations as we see when and how it was deployed in various contexts. Significantly, it plays a central role in the defining element of Christianity—identifying Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, who redeems believers from their sins. Significantly, Exodus does not play a major role in either Jewish or Christian writings following the first war with Rome (although notions of Jesus's atoning death do). Instead, a few writings suggest that the Babylonian exile provided the model for an imminent redemption from Rome, anticipated after a 60 to 70 year delay. When that fails to occur, rabbis turn again to Exodus for meaning and hope, but also as a hidden discourse that subverts Roman claims to legitimate sovereignty. Followers of Jesus also use the Exodus story to explain the brutal suppression of Judaea, but do so by blaming Jews, analogizing them to Egyptians, and sanctifying Jesus as the paschal lamb, whose blood confers salvation. Significantly, both interpretations of Exodus were codified and reinforced through ritual repetition every year at Passover and Easter, contributing to and enhancing the growing divide between Christianity and Judaism.

People live within a web of stories that frame their identities, inform their memories, and direct their behavior, and that behavior subsequently reinforces those same stories and memories through habit of repetition, conditioning, and ritual reinforcement. Exodus offers a prime example of this dynamic and reveals how stories help a community respond to social threats by providing meaning and a model of action. I will end with another quotation from Michael Jackson:

> Storytelling reworks and remodels subject-object relations in ways that subtly alter the balance between actor and acted upon, thus allowing us to feel that we actively participate in a world that for a moment seemed to discount, demean, and disempower us. . . even if we do not control events of our lives, we can control their meaning.

Yet, as we have seen, it is also the meaning of our shared stories that is most contingent, changing, and contested.

Bibliography

Aitken, Ellen Bradshaw. *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion*. NTOA. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004.

Albeck, Hanoch, ed. *The Mishna*. Jerusalem: Dvir Publishing House, 1988.

Alon, Gedaliah. *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70–640 C.E.)*. Translated and edited by Gershon Levi. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1980–84.

Appelbaum, Alan. "Hidden Transcripts in King-Parables: Windows on Rabbinic Resistance to Rome." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17 (2010): 287–301.

Avery-Peck, Alan J. "The Exodus in Jewish Faith; the Problem of God's Intervention in History." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 1, no. 1 (1998): 3–22.

Barmash, Pamela. "Reimagining Exile Through the Lens of Exodus." In *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile*, edited by John Ahn and Jill Anne Middlemas, 93–106. New York: T & T Clark, 2012.

Bernall, Misty. *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*. With a foreword by Madeleine L'Engle. Farmington: Pa. Plough, 2002.

Block-Smith, Elizabeth. "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel's History." *JBL* 122, no. 3 (2003): 401–25.

Bokser, Baruch M. "Messianism, the Exodus Pattern, and Early Rabbinic Judaism." In *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, 239–58. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

------. *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

------. "Martyrdom and the Making of Judaism and Christianity." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 577–627.

Burke, Peter. “History as Social Memory.” In *Varieties of Cultural History*, Peter Burke, 43–59. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London and New York: Verso, 2010.

Colautti, Federico M. *Passover in the Works of Josephus*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 75. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002.

Daly, Robert J. *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Deines, Roland. “How Long? God’s Revealed Schedule for Salvation and the Outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt.” In *Judaism and Crisis: Crisis as a Catalyst in Jewish Cultural History*, edited by Armin Lange, K.F. Diethard Römheld, and Matthias Weigold. Schriften Des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum, vol. 9, 201–34. Göttingen ; Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011.

Dewey, Arthur J. “The Locus for Death: Social Memory and the Passion Narratives.” In *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, edited by Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, 119–28. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Dunn, James D.G. *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*. Christianity in the Making, 2015.

Eck, Werner. “The Bar Kochba Revolt: The Roman Point of View.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 76–89.

Feldman, Louis H. “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 82, no. 3/4 (January-April 1992): 285–328.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Golden, Leon. “Zeus the Protector and Zeus the Destroyer.” *Classical Philology* 57, no. 1 (January 1962): 20–26.

Goldhill, Simon. “The Erotic Eye: Visual Stimulation and Cultural Conflict.” In *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire*, edited by Simon Goldhill, 154–94. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Hadas-Lebel, Mireille. “Jacob et Esaü ou Israël et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash.” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 201, no. 4 (1984): 369–92.

------. *Jérusalem Contre Rome*. Patrimoines. Judaïsme. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1990.

Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Hendel, Ronald Stephen. “Exodus: A Book of Memories.” *Bible Review* 18, no. 4 (2002): 38–45, 52.

Henten, Jan Willem van. *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 57. Leiden Brill, 1997.

Howard, J. K. “Passover and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20, no. 3 (1967): 239–337.

Isaac, Benjamin, and Aharon Oppenheimer. “The Rovolt of Bar Kokhba: Ideology and Modern Scholarship.” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 1 (1985): 33–60.

Jackson, Michael. *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgresion and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002.

Kirk, Alan. “The Memory of Violence and the Death of Jesus in Q.” In *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, edited by Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, 191–206. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Kraabel, A. T. “Melito the Bishop and the Synagogue at Sardis: Text and Context.” In *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann*, edited by David Gordon Mitten, John Griffiths

Pedley, and Jane Ayer Scott. Monographs in Art and Archaeology, 77–85. Mainz, W. Germany: Verlag P. von Zabern, 1971.

Kugel, James L. *The Bible as It Was*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Parallax. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Leonhard, Clemens. Review of in *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006.

Loewenstamm, Samuel E. *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*. Translated from the Hebrew by Baruch J. Schwartz. Publication of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1992.

Machinist, Peter. "Outsiders or Insiders: The Biblical View of Emergent Israel and Its Contexts." In *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, eds Laurence J. Silverstein and Robert L. Cohn, 35–60. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Neal, Arthur G. *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.

Pickup, M. "Eschatological Interpretation in Shirata." *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* (1998), 83–99.

Reed, Annette Yoshiko. "Jewish Christianity After the Parting of the Ways: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine Literature." In *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, 188–231. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

------. "Parting Ways Over Blood and Water? Beyond 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' in the Roman Near East." In *La Croisée Des Chemins Revisitée*, Simon C. Mimouni and Bernard Pouderon, 227–60. Paris: Cerf, 2012.

Reed, Annette Yoshiko, and Lilly Vuong. “Christianity in Antioch: Partings in Roman Syria.” In *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, edited by Hershel Shanks, 105–32. Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013.

Schäfer, Peter. “Hadrian’s Policy in Judaea and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: A Reassessment.” In *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, edited by Philip R. Davies & Richard T. White. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series, vol. 100, 281–303. Sheffield: Sheffield JSOT Press, 1990.

Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations*. Leiden: Brill, 1976 [reprint 2001].

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Werman, Cana. “Narrative in the Service of Halakha: Abraham, Prince Mastema, and the Paschal Offering in *Jubilees*.” In *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures*, edited by Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie, and Nili Wazana, 225–42. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012.

Wilson, S. G. “Passover, Easter, and Anti-Judaism: Melito of Sardis and Others.” In *“To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, edited by Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, literary editor Caroline McCracken-Flesher. Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities, 337–56. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985.

Wilson, Stephen. *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Wintermute, O. S. “Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction.” In *Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judaeo-Hellenistic Works*. Vol. 2 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, 35–142. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Wright, N.T. “New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8.” In *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013*, N.T. Wright, 160–68. Minneapolis: MN Fortress Press c, 2013.