

THE CHRIST
As Seen In
THE SOURCES OF
THE CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

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THE CHRIST AS SEEN IN THE SOURCES OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

Ahmed Abdel-Wahab-Ali

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**A Comment on Gospel Commentaries
and Studies of Some Distinguished
Scholars of Christianity :**

- Denis Nineham
- John Fenton
- George Caird
- John Marsh
- Charles Dodd
- Frederic Grant
- Adolf Harnack

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

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Preface

This book has the privilege to speak of Jesus Christ, preceded by thousands and thousands of books, and to be followed by still many more.

This study basically stands on the vision of Christ as seen through the sources of the Christian beliefs. It is therefore reasonable to devote in the study of these Christian sources as much concentration as is necessary and sufficient to the study of the Christ himself.

It is mainly a compilation of studies and investigations relating to the subject matter by some distinguished scholars of Christianity, submitted to the readers who, surely, differ widely in their cultures and interests.

Today's man lives in an age of enlightenments which boasts of Mental Libration, and technological revolution, ... etc. The mind of this age cannot accept dictated beliefs, or inherited dogma, without proof.

Belief is, no doubt, a personal matter, but it is belief and behaviour that determines man's future and eternal life. So it is the ethical responsibility of scholars to make the result of their studies available to those who have been swept off by the pressures of life to enable them to think over their beliefs, in the light of the latest religious studies.

Religious studies stand at the head of the investigations that cannot stand without documentation and supporting proofs. That is why so many testimonies are quoted from the studies and conclusions of the scholars of Christianity. **Texts** quoted are put between quotation marks, as usual, so that the reader may easily distinguish the scholar's sayings from those of the author.

Let it be mentioned at the outset that the author of this book believes fully in Christ, and is one of his followers, as also of all the prophets sent by God. He believes that the Christ is 'a word of God conveyed to Mary' who miraculously conceived and borne him. He is 'a spirit from God' — Son of man — a messenger of God — a

prophet like Moses — Teacher and Master — and the Prince of Peace.

He performed many miracles, signs of God; he healed many who were sick with various diseases, cast out many demons, and revived the dead.

He 'was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people and a man approved of by God among the people for performing miracles and wonders and signs, which God granted him.'

At the beginning of his ministry he said : 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' And at the end of his ministry, he said : 'And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'

Lastly, let this book be an inducement to the study of the Christ's teachings, 'Search the scriptures, they are they which testify of me'; an apology for what had been wrongly attached to his true doctrines; and expression of sympathy with him for many evils committed in his name across the centuries, and are still being committed by different Christian sects, against followers of other religions, especially the Muslims; and in the end, let this book be a collection of information, preserved for the truth seekers. About two thousand years ago, before the Christ came, he had been preceded by "the voice of one crying in the wilderness — of Palestine — saying : 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

And today, where belief in God and living according to His directed way are about to be completely lost, how many 'crying in the spiritual wilderness' in the whole world are needed ?

Many and many, but some faithful of them may suffice.

Ahmed Abdel-Wahab Ali

Chapter 1

The Sources of the Christian Beliefs

- The New Testament
- The Gospels

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Bible is composed of two main parts : The Old Testament and the New Testament.

“The former contains 39 books, as reckoned by Protestants, with a supplement known as the Apocrypha, the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox Churches include the Apocrypha in the Old Testament, and therefore assign 53 books to it. The New Testament contains 27 books upon which number all Churches agree. Since Jews accept only the Old Testament and reject both the Apocrypha (found only in Greek translations, not in the original Hebrew) and the New Testament, they understand the term ‘Bible’ to mean the 39 books of the Hebrew (or Palestinian) Canon, recognized by Protestants.

The Hebrew Bible consists of three parts :

1. The Law : Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, **Deuteronomy** ;
2. The Prophets : (A) **Former** Prophets : Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; (B) **Later** Prophets : Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets.
3. The Writings (Hagiographa) : (A) Psalms, Proverbs, Job; (B) Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther; (D) Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles.

The three divisions mark successive canonizations : the Law (about 400 B.C.); the Prophets (about 200 B.C.); and the Writings (about 90 A.D.)”¹

The New Testament is the second part of the Bible. In this section, we are going to look into the New Testament under the guidance of some distinguished scholars of Christianity.

¹ Ref 15 : Vol. 3, pp. 612, 623

The General Features of the New Testament

The New Testament is an unhomogeneous supplement to the Old Testament :

Frederic Grant says:

“The earliest Christians did not think of their sacred books as forming a ‘New’ Testament (or the documentation of a new Covenant) distinct from the Old : the two were one and the same and continuous. ‘The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms’ (Luke 24 : 44) — or, better, as the third class, the ‘Writings’ — were perfectly familiar to all Jews, including the Christian Jews in Palestine and elsewhere, and also to all converted proselytes, who already had been attached to the Jewish synagogue before their conversion to Christianity. When the early Christian writings appeared — Paul’s epistles, which were read publicly at the assemblies for worship (Col. 4 : 16), came first, then other writings, epistles, homilies, and gospels — they were looked upon as proper additions, supplementary to the lections from the Law and the Prophets, which were read each week in both Jewish synagogue and Christian Church.. When we turn to the New Testament we do not expect to find a fixed and definite system of doctrine, or a fully articulated scheme or plan of Church organization. Quite the contrary : we expect to find — and we do find — anticipations - - suggestions that were never followed out, tentative and experimental solutions that were destined to be overlooked and forgotten in the onward-moving development of the Church’s life..

It is, (the N.T.), of course, not all one uniform book, but a collection. It represents not one sole dominating view, but a variety of views, so that one can trace with considerable accuracy the different directions in which Christian thought and feeling advanced, as well as — with some limitations — the geographical and numerical expansion of the Church, and also the stages in the earliest development of the Church’s theology and ethics, worship and organization.’²

² Ref. 4 · pp. 12, 13, 17.

Views of the Christian Sects About the New Testament

Günter Lanczkowski writes:

“The doctrines which the various Churches and schools of theological thought use, however, to establish the spiritual authority of the New Testament, differ considerably one from the other. The Roman Catholic Church holds fast to the doctrine of Inspiration which was explicitly confirmed at the Vatican Council held in Rome in 1869-70, according to which the canonical books of the Old and New Testament were ‘written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have God as their Author and as such have been delivered to the Church.’ Orthodox believers in the Protestant Church also subscribe to the doctrine of Inspiration -- Liberal Protestants regard the books of the New Testament as records of the beginning of the Christian religion which are, like any other ancient historical documents, open to scientific investigation and philological criticism.”³

The Orthodox believe, as Timothy Ware states, that:

“The Bible is the supreme expression of God’s revelation to man, and Christians must always be ‘People of the Book’.. The Orthodox Church has the same New Testament as the rest of Christendoms. As its authoritative text for the Old Testament, it uses the ancient Greek translation known as the Septuagint.. Christianity, if true, has nothing to fear from honest inquiry. Orthodoxy, while regarding the Church as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture, does not forbid the critical and historical study of the Bible, although hitherto Orthodox scholars have not been prominent in this field.”⁴

The Contents of the New Testament

According to Günter Lanczkowski :

“The New Testament contains the following 27 books : The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; The Acts of the Apostles;

³Ref. 5 : p. 31

⁴Ref. 11 pp. 207-9

The epistles of Paul to the Romans, Corinthians (2), Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians (2), to Timothy (2), Titus, Philemon and the Hebrews; The Catholic Epistle of Peter (2), John (3), James and Jude; The Revelation (Apocalypse) of John:

For the last 150 years scholars have recognised that the first three gospels differ stylistically and materially from the gospel of John and that they are closely related to one another. Because they need to be studied together they have been called the 'synoptic' gospels. Their contacts with one another are the basis of the 'theory of the two sources' according to which the shortest of the gospels, that of Mark, was used by the two longer ones and therefore represents one of the sources of Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke also share certain special material, however, consisting almost entirely of words of Jesus. The material common to these two gospels is attributed to a second source which is described as a collection of sayings or speeches. The synoptic gospels are closely related both in their structure and their subject matter. They owe their existence to the overwhelming impact of the earthly life and message of Jesus, as transmitted by the Church. They choose the form of an itinerary for their historical narrative. They link up Jesus's first public appearance with the work of John the Baptist; they describe his travels through Galilee, they give an account of his preaching, which reached its climax in the Sermon on the Mount, and of his miracles. Finally, they describe the journey to Jerusalem leading to his condemnation. The synoptic gospels close with an account of the appearances of the Risen Lord. The message, which Jesus proclaims, partly in the form of parables is that of the imminent irruption of the kingdom of God, which he associates with the preaching of John the Baptist, who said :

'Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand'

(Matthew 3 : 2).

According to Jesus what is required is a complete change of outlook and this can be brought about only by following two great commandments (Matthew 22, 37 ff; cf. Mark 12, 30 f):

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind. This is the greatest of the commandments and the first. And the second, its like, is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.'

Jesus interprets his new commandment not as a departure from

but as a fulfilment of the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5: 17):

'Do not think that I have come to set aside the law and the prophets; I have not come to set them aside but to bring them to perfection..'

Five books of the New Testament have come down to us under the name of John : the Gospel, three Epistles, and the Revelation. The Gospel and the first Epistle were probably written by the same author. Since the end of the second century the Church has referred to him as Jesus's favourite disciple. The Gospel according to John is notably different from the synoptics. It contains no accounts of the Nativity but begins with a prologue in which the origin of Jesus, is traced to the eternity of God and in which he is described as the Word made flesh, the Logos (1, 1-4¹³).

In the account of Jesus' public activity there are differences of time and place as compared with the synoptic records, and there is less emphasis on the coming of the Kingdom more on the divine character of the Saviour. Instead of a simple narrative of the events themselves John provides rather an interpretation based on the belief in Christ's divinity.

The Acts of the Apostles form a sequel to the third Gospel, in other words, they are the second part of the Lucan narrative. Like the Gospels themselves they are not primarily concerned with history. Their purpose in recording the acts of the apostles, the formation of the early Church and the missionary expansion of Christianity as far as Rome.. The book was also intended as an attack on paganism..

The letters which Paul wrote from prison form a group on their own, consisting of the letters to the Philippians, the Colosians, the Ephesians and to Philemon. The authorship of the letter to Ephesians has been contested. Among the post-Pauline letters, the two to Timothy and the letter to Titus which were not written by Paul are anti-gnostic polemical pamphlets of the post-Pauline period..

The letter to the Hebrews, which is a treatise of instruction with an epistolary ending, was also included in the canon as Pauline; but it is now certain that Paul did not write it..

A considerable number of early Christian writings was excluded from the New Testament canon. They consisted mainly of the apocryphal gospels (Gospels according to Hebrews and according

to the Egyptians and the Gospel of Peter) and apocryphal Acts, non-canonical Apocalypses (Apocalypse of Peter; the 'Shepherd' of Hermas), the Didache (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), the letters of the apostolic Fathers and apologetic texts..

The exact date at which the canon of the New Testament was fixed is not certain.”⁵

The Original Language of the New Testament:

“The New Testament is, from beginning to end, a Greek book. Although the earliest oral tradition of Jesus’ deeds and sayings undoubtedly circulated in Aramaic, which was still the spoken language of Palestine and of some other parts of the Near East (certainly among Jews), it was not long before this oral tradition was translated into the ordinary, every day Greek which was spoken everywhere else in the civilized Mediterranean world. (Traces of the original Aramaic tradition survive here and there : for example, in Mark 5 : 41; 15 : 34 :

‘And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is being interpreted : Damsel, I say unto thee, arise..

‘And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabackthani? Which is being interpreted : My God. my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”⁶

Factors that Affected the Existence of the New Testament

Different factors have affected the existence of the New Testament as regards its material, structure, and collection. In general two main factors had their greatest influence namely :

1. The belief in the second coming of the Christ;
2. Gnosticism.

The following gives brief outlines of each of these factors.

1. The Belief in the Second Coming of Christ :

Early Christians—including the disciples—believed in the

⁵ Ref. 5 : pp. 31-7

⁶ Ref. 16 : Vol. 3, p. 654

imminent end of the world, which would not be later than the first century; terrible events would precede the Second Coming of Christ. "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another.. they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Such a belief exercised its gravest influence on the Christian Writings. The ENC. BRIT. says :

"The expansion of the Christian Church in Europe during the 1st century stands for us as the beginning of a new era in history. But the movement wore a different aspect to those who shared in it : to them it was an end rather than a beginning 'The ends of the ages' had come upon them, and the consummation, they believed, could not be long delayed. The literature of the apostolic age, written as it was for the most part under this conviction, was not intended by its writers to be a permanent authority of a Church which was to remain for ages 'militant here upon earth.' It was called forth by the needs of a generation which expected to survive to see the end of history and the inauguration of God's kingdom. Thus the New Testament, as a collection of Scriptures was an ~~undelivered~~ and ~~unforeseen~~ product of the apostolic age. The fervour of the first age cooled, as the fulfilment of its early hope was deferred, but it left a large and widespread body of believers who still continued, though in a changed world and with a changed emphasis, to cherish the faith and the ideals which they had learned from their first evangelists."

In his commentary on Saint Matthew's gospel, John Fenton writes:

"Matthew believed that the present history of the world, involving as it does sin and sickness and death, would come to an end soon. Jesus would come in glory, and everyone would be allotted to one or another of two classes, — 'the blessed' and 'the cursed,' and be sent either to eternal life or eternal punishment (25³¹). Matthew believed that this would happen soon : before the apostles would have had time to preach in all the towns of Israel (10²³); before some of Jesus' contemporaries had died

¹ Ref 17 Vol. 2, p 514

(16th); before that generation had passed away (24th). And it is clear that it did not happen as Matthew expected.

Although Matthew's Gospel is one of the places in the New Testament where this expectation of the imminent end of the world is most clearly expressed, in fact almost all the New Testament writers expressly state this belief; and in the opinions of a very large number of scholars, Jesus himself looked forward to his coming to the earth in glory soon after his death.

The idea that God would intervene soon, and reveal himself as King over the world by abolishing everything that was against his will, was not confined to Christians: we find it in the Jewish writers of books called 'apocalypses' (e.g. Daniel), and it may be that the Jewish sect which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls also thought in this way. We know from Jewish sources that people claiming to be Messiah, i.e. God's king, sent to rule at the end of this age, had appeared in Palestine at the time when Jesus was alive, and had succeeded in persuading people to follow them and accept their claims. So belief that the end of this age was near was in the air in the first century, and Christians breathed it just as much as their Jewish contemporaries.

We cannot take Matthew's statements about the end literally: history has proved them wrong."⁴

Belief in a second advent of the Christ had its deep influence on the writings and behaviour of the early Christians. Under its influence, there arose calls unto ideal forgiveness, giving no thought to the worldly life, and being attracted to monasticism. Scholars are agreed on the fact that:

"The New Testament is a collection of writings by persons who, much as they differed in other things, were agreed in this, that they lived in a world that was rapidly coming to an end, a world in which men and women might indeed rear children, but no one could look forward to a next generation. The effective reason for not taking thought for the morrow was the improbability that to-morrow would ever arrive. Hence the discouragement of marriage, the little care for training of children, and the absence of public spirit and

⁴ Ret pp. 21-2

interest in the affairs of the world, manifested in the New Testament. It should be added that although the writer of I John ii. 18 declares it was then 'the last hour,' it is in the Johannine writings that we see the beginning of a tendency to reinterpret the earlier Christian expectation of an immediate conclusion of world-history.

A further development, which has gone side by side with the full recognition of the fact that Jesus and his disciples were expecting the near approaching End, is a move thorough study of Jewish popular beliefs in the age between that of the Maccabees (from 168 B.C.) and that of the 1st Century A.D. It was no special superstition of Christians, but the general expectation of the Jewish people that 'the Kingdom of God was immediately to appear' (Luke xix. II). This belief sent them to war with Rome in A.D. 66, a war which ended with the extinction of the Jewish state and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."⁹

2 Gnosticism:

"The origin, extent and precise nature of Gnosticism is still debated among scholars, some viewing it is a Christian heresy, pure and simple, an intra-ecclesiastical movement that threatened to transform Christianity into a speculative mythological, even polytheistic religion of 'salvation by knowledge' (gnosis), others holding it to be a vast world religious movement, earlier than Christianity in its origins, and sweeping into the early Church as part of its tidal movement everywhere in the 2d and 3d centuries."¹⁰

Gnosticism has deeply influenced the Christian Church in the second century. Its beginnings are usually traced — as they were by the Church fathers — to Simon Magus of Samaria (see Act 8,9-24), though its most eminent and most influential teachers, men like Basilids and Valentinus, belong to the period A.D. 130 - 150..

It was fundamentally dualistic, matter and spirit being in complete opposition — as in Orphism — where the formula was found, body = tomb, (i.e. of the soul). It also included elements from popular astrology, with its iron mechanism of unyielding fate, and it assumed that the material universe is evil, the creation of wicked or fallen or downward — tending spirits, inflamed with

⁹ Ref. 17 : Vol. 2, p. 523

¹⁰ Ref. 16 : Vol. 3, p. 653

wicked passions or in revolt against the Supreme Being, who was the One as opposed to the Many. Hence birth is evil, for it means the entrance of an originally spiritual being in this lower realm of matter, hence marriage is evil, as it leads to procreation and further enslavement within the cycle of existence, hence marriage is to be avoided, and the pure soul must live as little contaminated by the flesh as is possible in the present life. Echoes of such teachings are to be found even in the New Testament (e.g. I Tim. 4 : 3)..

Among the many different types of early Gnosticism, the one which most seriously affected Christian teaching in the area from which the Fourth Gospel came, or at least to which it was addressed, is that known as Docetism. Here the 'heavenly messenger' or 'witness' who brings the 'saving knowledge' is Christ.. although he entered the world, he himself was never contaminated by its physical material. He was the 'true light,' and the darkness never overcame him (cf. John 1 : 5).. The explanation of this is simple : he did not really adopt a body of flesh, but only a phantom shape resembling one.. His flesh was unreal.. And had not Paul described him as coming only 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8 : 3) — not 'in the flesh' or as flesh? (Contrast John 1 : 14, which boldly states that 'the word became flesh').

It is against this particular type that the Fourth Gospel is directed, a type which 'denied that Jesus Christ has come in flesh'..

In the Gnostic Gospels, before the first nail was driven into his hands and feet, the aeon Christ left his temporary house of the 'body,' and only an empty shell was left on the cross. Or his final cry was not 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' but 'My power, my power, why hast thou left me?'"¹¹

Gnosticism with its origins inherited from ancient mythology and dressed in metaphysics, has deeply influenced Christianity. Some early Christians, including Churchmen were gnostics, who fought against antignostics and other Christian sects. This struggle produced the gospels of John — the latest of the gospels — which introduced in Christianity new philosophical expressions, especially when it said:

‘In the beginning was the Word , and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.. He was in the

¹¹ Ref 4 : pp. 22, 160-1

world.. Yet the world knew him not.. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?.. the Father who dwells in me does his works.. I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.. as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me..." This is the philosophical gospel which imported the notion of god-dwelling from ancient theologies and mythology. Although, it is often said that this fourth gospel came to struggle against Gnosticism — which affected Paul-by asserting that Jesus Christ came in real flesh-not a phantom-yet, it could never escape its mythical thoughts.

Charles Potter says:

"The first part (and several other parts) of John's Gospel- 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..' — is pure Gnosticism.. Jesus' own teaching, his doctrine, his personal belief, as far as we can discover it by disentangling it from the words which gospel writers and later theology — minded editors so obviously put in his mouth, never did become the dogmatic trinitarian neo-Gnostic system which Paul and his successors constructed out of what the twelve apostles and other disciples remembered Jesus to have said and done.

Remember that Paul, in shaping up his Christology (his theory of relation of Jesus to God and man and history), was not handicapped by having to make it conform to the King James version of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or the Acts of the Apostles. All his 'epistles' were written before the earliest manuscripts of the Gospels and Acts appeared. It is doubtful also if he ever saw the pre — gospel collections of the teachings, parables, and healing miracles of Jesus — documents supposed to have been the sources, in part at least, of the four canonical Gospels."¹²

The trinitarian dogma which the Johannean writings referred to was the dogma accepted later by the Church, in spite of its contradictions to the synoptic gospels, and to the dogma of Unitarianism explicitly expressed in John's gospel itself, a fact which impelled some scholars to remark that:

"One important and difficult problem however grows out of

¹² Ref. 14 : pp. 24, 123

the contrast which appears in many ways between the fourth Gospel and the other three. Their unlikeness is so great that it is scarcely surprising that some have felt that they were positively inconsistent, that if the synoptics are accepted as authentic, the unauthenticity of John must follow."¹³

GROUPS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

| | | |
|---------|---|--|
| A.D. | | |
| 50 | 1-2 Thessalonians | The Pauline Epistles, in three groups |
| 51 | Galatians (perhaps 55) | |
| 55 | 1-2 Corinthians | |
| 56 | Romans | |
| 59-61 | Philippians Philemon Colossians (Ephesians?) | |
| 68 | Gospel of Mark | Synoptic Gospels and Acts |
| 90 | Gospel of Luke | |
| 95 | Acts of the Apostles | |
| 95-112 | Gospel of Matthew | A 'Catholic Apostolic' group |
| 95 | Apocalypse of John | |
| C.95 | Hebrews | |
| | 1 Peter Jude James | |
| 96-98 | 1 Clement | The Pastoral Epistles |
| 100 | 1-2 Timothy Titus | |
| 100-125 | Gospel of John 1-2-3 John | |
| 110-115 | Epistles of Ignatius Epistle of Polycarp | Anti-Gnostic writings |
| 125. | Quadratus' Apology | |

¹³ Ref. 16 : Vol. 13, p. 73

| | | |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|
| 135 | Papias' exposition of the Oracles of the Lord | |
| 135 | Epistle of Barnabas |] Late 'Apostolic' writings |
| | Teaching of the Twelve Apostles = The Didache | |
| 135 | Shepherd of Hermas (or earlier, C. 100 ?) | |
| 140 | Aristides' Apology (or earlier) | |
| 140 | Marcion's Antitheses |] Gnostic works |
| | Valentinus' Gospel of Truth | |
| 150 | 2 Peter | Apocryphal; based on Jude |
| C.150 | The Fourfold Gospel Canon 2 Clement | |
| 155 | Justins' Apology I |] Apologetic works |
| | Justins' Dialogue | |
| 161 | Justins' Apology II | |
| 176 | Tatians' Oration | |
| ? | Epistle to Diognetus | |

The purpose of this chart is not to display a final chronological scheme, since the dates are in many instances either uncertain or only approximate. But even with an approximate dating it is clear that the early Christian writings appeared for the most part in groups."¹⁴

It should be noted that most of the Christian Writings included in the New Testament were written and ascribed to individuals, who had been killed or died before decades of their so-called dates. For example I Peter, (c.A.D. 95), II-Peter. (c.A.D. 150), ascribed to Peter, and 1-2 Timothy, Titus (c.A.D. 100) ascribed to Paul, in spite of the tradition that both were killed in Rome before A.D. 70.

Besides, the Pauline letters were the earliest writings accepted by the Church, in spite of the fact that Paul had never been a disciple,

¹⁴ Ref. 4 : pp. 20-1

but declared himself suddenly to be a Christian after having seen a vision. The disciples would have never trusted him without the testimony of Barnabas:

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles (Acts 9 : 26).

For he (Barnabas) was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” Acts 11 : 24

Barnabas was always the commissioner of the disciples and took Paul with him in many of the Christian missions. But later Paul quarrelled with Barnabas and separated from him:

“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.” Acts 15 : 39.

But strongly the doctrines of Paul predominated, and his writings were the earliest Christian accepted documents, which are still widely used for testimonies of the Christian belief, even more than the gospels themselves.

Canon of the New Testament

“The term canon (Greek kanon) is applied to the list of books accepted generally throughout the Church as inspired and therefore as containing the authoritative statement of Christian doctrine. (The term is applied to both the Old Testament and the New). ‘History of the New Testament Canon’ means the history of the books that were gradually set apart from the rest of early Christian literature and added to the collection of Jewish sacred writings contained in the Greek Old Testament..

The complete New Testament as we have it today was not fully determined until the 4th century. By the year 200 the contents of our New Testament were quite generally recognized. The main contents namely the Four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul were widely accepted. Uncertainty attached to only three or four of the other books now in the canon, and there was some question whether or not to include two or three which were eventually excluded..

It was not by any decree of synod or council that the choice was made, but by the constant test of daily usage these books stood out as uniquely valuable for edification, instruction, and positive statement of historic Christianity over against the speculative vagaries and misinterpretations of the Gnostic and other heretical groups. Only in the case of two major New Testament books was there long delay.

Although written in the West, perhaps in Rome, probably in Italy, the homily known as The Epistle to Hebrews was not accepted in the West for a long time. The reasons for this delay are not clear, perhaps there was too much uncertainty of its authorship, or its theology and exegesis may have seemed too unpauline; or its somewhat philosophical outlook may have been uncongenial to the Church in the West.

But it was accepted in the East, where Philo's Stoicized Platonism and his allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament had been taken over by the Church; and where the difficulty of the unknown authorship did not seem so serious. Origen of Alexandria acknowledged that no one knew who its author was ('Only God knows'), but insisted that its teaching was consonant with Paul..

The other major writing which was delayed in its admission to the canon was the Apocalypse (or Revelation) of St. John. In this case it was the East that hesitated curiously, it was the West that first admitted the Revelation of John.

The Gospels were gathered together into the 'fourfold evangel' C.150 A.D. and thus formed another main group of New Testament writings.. It used to be thought that the main influence in the creation of the canon was the attempt of Marcion, C.140 A.D., to collect a group of the Christian sacred writings in order to offset and supplant the Old Testament, his views were strongly anti-Jewish, and more or less Gnostics, he held that God of the Jews, the Lawgiver the Creator of the world, was a subordinate and really evil deity, and that Christ had come to earth to reveal the one good God, the 'Father' of Jesus Christ who is superior to the Creator God of the Mosaic Law. In his attempt to weed out all traces of Judaism from the Christian sacred books, Marcion produced a 'New Testament' limited to Luke (which he drastically revised to fit his own peculiar views), Galatians (strongly critical of the Law), I - II Corinthians, Romans, I - II Thessalonians, Loadiceans (= Ephesians), Colossians, Philippians, Philemon. This was the

'Evangel' and 'Apostle' which Marcion set over against the law and Prophets of the Old Testament..

There were undoubtedly other early Christian writings which have not survived, in fact the New Testament itself contains references to such writings (Colossians 4 : 16; Luke 1 : 1-2). Moreover there were some which served as 'Sources' upon which the surviving books were based. Once incorporated in larger works, these earlier collections of material ceased to be copied and so eventually disappeared."¹⁵

In brief, nobody can say at what place and how the four Gospels gained their canon. Scholars could not therefore testify except :

"We have no certain knowledge as to how or where the fourfold Gospel canon came to be formed.

It is to be noted that Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 97) and Polycarp (c. 112) both quote sayings of the Lord in a form which is independent of any of the Gospels which afterwards became canonical. It is probable that each of the four canonical Gospels gained currency and prestige through being adopted by someone of the **great Churches**. Thus there is strong reason for associating Mark with Rome, whence it probably obtained currency in other Churches. Matthew — a revised and expanded Mark — appears to have been in use at Antioch at the beginning of the 2nd century. John is connected with Ephesus. Some think that the fourfold Gospel originated in Asia Minor, where we have evidence of comparative study of the merits of some Gospels early in the 2nd century. Others think it more likely that the Fourfold Gospel came from Rome."¹⁶

It is to be noted that the canon of the New Testament took about 350 years to form:

"At the beginning of that (4th) century there was still much uncertainty. Eusebius describes the situation and divides the books into three classes : (i) those which are generally acknowledged, (ii) those which are disputed but widely recognized and (iii) those which are rejected. To the first class belong the four Gospels, Acts; the Epistles of Paul, I Peter, I John, and, if it is wished, the

¹⁵ Ref. 16 · Vol. 3, pp. 651-3

¹⁶ Ref. 17 · Vol. 2, p. 514

Apocalypse of John; to the second, James, Jude, II Peter, II and III John, and to the last the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, Barnabas, the Didache, and according to some, the Apocalypse of John. Others reckon the Gospel according to the Hebrews in this class."¹⁷

Uncanonical Gospels:

“They are also called Pseudepigraphal Gospels, because of the lack of authenticity for their contents. Some are probably lost entirely and others have descended to us in fragments only.. (We can mention the following uncanonical Gospels):

1. **The Gospel of Thomas**
2. **The Gospel of Pseudo—Matthew**
3. **The Gospel of the Egyptians**
So called because it circulated among them; is referred to by Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Epiphanius.
4. **The Gospel of Peter**
Of very early origin. It is said to have been used ‘either for private reading or in public worship, by the Church at Rhossus on the coast of Syria not far from Antioch.’
5. **The Gospel of Basilides**
Of Alexandrian origin, the group claiming to have the authority of Peter’s interpreter Gloucias in matters of doctrine.
6. **The Gospel of Marcion**
An edition of Luke prepared by Marcion for those who like himself were antagonistic to Judaism.
7. **The Gospel of Apelles**
The disciple of Marcion, is only a conjecture.
8. **The Gospel of Naassences**
A gnostic sect.
9. **The Gospel of Philip**
Exists in a mere fragment preserved by Epiphanius.

¹⁷ Ref. 17. Vol. 2, p. 314

10. The Gospel of Matthias

Matthias was elected an apostle after the resurrection and it is assumed that he received secret revelation from Jesus.

11. The Gospel of Mary

Exists in three fragments only, one of which is in Coptic.

12. The Gospel of Bartholomew

Exists in Latin, Greek and Coptic fragments, some of them as early as the 9th century. According to the fragments Jesus allows Bartholomew to see and interrogate Satan. He is 600 cubits high and 300 broad and is guarded by 6064 angels. Bartholomew kicks and infuriates Satan and learns from him some of his secrets for tempting men.

13. The Gospel of Nicodemus

Is sometimes called the 'Acts of Pilate.' In recent years it had been very widely circulated.

14. The Gospel of Gamaliel

Is largely conjectural as to its existence.

15. The Gospel of Perfection

Originated among the Ophite Gnostics according to Epiphanius.

In addition to all the above documents the following are mentioned by the early fathers of the Church. There are no fragments or quotations from them in existence known to the scholars of this day : The Acts of Andrew; the Gospel of Andrew; the Gospel according to the Twelve Apostles; the Gospel of Barnabas;... .. besides many general Acts of the Apostles that may have had some bearing on the Gospel narratives."¹⁶

Scribing of the New Testament:

"Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age" (Luke 3 : 23), and he continued to carry his mission for a disputed period, some say one year, others say more. However, all scholars are agreed that, it can never exceed three years.

If we consider the last estimation as the right one, then it would mean that the Christ wandered among the Israilites for three years, preaching the gospel, saying that the kingdom of heaven is at hand,

¹⁶ Ref 16 : Vol. 13, pp. 70-1

healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out demons, teaching his disciples and followers, and arguing with his opponents. In all this the Aramaic was the language used by Christ, his disciples and 'the crowds.' In brief, the Aramaic was the original language of the gospel.

After a period, not less than 20 years, Paul—who was neither a disciple nor had he ever seen the Christ—began to write his letters, which were considered later on as the earliest acknowledged Christian Writings. After that, not less than 15 years passed, when Mark—who also, was never a disciple—began to write his gospel, the oldest one.

But all the earliest available Christian Writings were in Greek. So nothing was in original. All were mere translations from Aramaic into Greek!

We have shown that the New Testament is a Greek book, from beginning to end, and it did not have its canonicity, in the usual form known today, before the fourth century.

About three hundred and fifty years had elapsed before it became possible to have an approximate answer to the important question : Which of the Christian Writings can be considered sacred, and should be collected together, to form the New Testament? But up till now—when the second thousand A.D. is about to come to its end—there could be no exact answer to the more serious and important question:

What were the true words and speeches that the Christ did utter, especially when he was preaching his Gospel and giving his doctrines?

The written gospels appeared having different texts for the same speech, incident or narrative. From time to time, new translations of the New Testament appeared, with significant changes of the texts.

No doubt that the problem of the 'text' is the main one which scholars are now aiming to solve.

Once this essential objective is achieved, the hope for unity among Christians can be fulfilled.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica records:

"The original autographs (of the Greek MSS.) of the New Testament books have long since perished, and (except for a few fragments, all from upper Egypt) the same fate had overtaken all the MSS. used by Christians in the ante-Nicen period..

It is noteworthy that till the invention of printing neither in the original Greek nor in Latin was a complete uniformity of text arrived at..

A leading cause of this remarkable state of things must be sought in the very extensive variations which were current in early times particularly in the Gospels. Apart from some half - dozen remarkable readings, the text of the Pauline Epistles resembles that of most ancient works, there are plenty of scribes' errors, etc., and the MSS. fall into groups as is natural but the variations are of small account and are mostly explicable from the context. In a word, the variations are accidental. In the Gospels on the other hand, the characteristic variations are intentional, such as the addition or insertion of whole passages, some of which must certainly have been supplied from an external source."¹⁹

George Caird observes:

"The first printed text of the Greek New Testament was that of Erasmus, published in 1516. Prior to that date the text was preserved only in manuscripts, laboriously copied by the pens of many scribes. Of these manuscripts about 4,700 survive today, ranging from small fragments of papyrus to complete vellum codices. The text of all of them vary considerably, and none of them can be regarded as free from error. The work of the copyist was exacting, and he might well suffer from inattention, weariness, or astigmatism. However conscientious he was, he made mistakes, and these mistakes were perpetuated in any copies that were later made from his copy. Most existing manuscripts of any size have undergone further alterations at the hands of correctors, who did not always manage to restore the true reading."²⁰

The texts of the New Testament are generally classified in three groups : Byzantine, Alexandrian and Western.

1. "The Byzantine text is a recension properly so called the form in which the Gospel was introduced into the new Christian metropolis of Constantinople, it was an eclectic fusion of texts previously current, and contains hardly in any ancient element not better preserved elsewhere.

¹⁹ Ref. 17 : Vol. 2, pp. 519-21

²⁰ Ref. 8 : p. 32

2. "The Alexandrian text seems to have some connection with the great Christian scholar Origen, who (so far as we know) was the first to pay attention to the exact wording of the Gospels and to make any comparison of MSS.
3. "The 'Western' text is not exclusively Western in the geographical sense, nor is it a single definite recension, it is more accurate to say the 'Western' readings represent the variegated and uncorrected state of the text in the ante-Nicene period, especially from about A.D. 150 (when the Gospels were first collected together into a common corpus) until the time of Constantine."²¹

In order to extract one agreed text from the well known different texts, many attempts had been made, but the result was failure. That is why the Encyclopaedia Britannica says :

"It is a vain hope to imagine that we can arrive at the original text by constructing the Alexandrian, the old - Western, and the old - Eastern texts, and then accepting the agreement of either two against the other."²²

God alone knows who wrote these Scriptures, what was the true gospel of the Christ and what had his true disciples written. From the mere Christian sources, nothing can be said with full confidence and certainty.



²¹ Ref. 17 : Vol. 2, p. 321

²² Ref. 17 : Vol. 2, p. 321

THE GOSPELS

What is the Gospel:

It is traditional to say that a gospel means good news. Sometimes this definition is given account of the linguistic factors, as when it is said that the word gospel comes from good - spell.

But in fact the matter is not so easy to be settled in this way. Scholars are still trying to find out what does the word 'gospel' exactly mean.

In one of these attempts, John Fenton says in the introduction to his commentary on Matthews' gospel :

"No writer from the time when the Gospels were written has left us any information that would enable us to answer the question, What is a Gospel?... To our author (Matthew), a Gospel seems to have been an arrangement of the material describing the words and deeds of Jesus in such a way that certain doctrines held by the author might be expressed through the pattern of the whole book..

So far, we have been mainly concerned with the form of the Gospel : and it may have come as a surprise to some readers to find that a Gospel is not simply an account of the life of Jesus, arranged chronologically. But there are other difficulties which present themselves to a twentieth-century reader of Matthew's Gospel, difficulties connected with subject - matter than with form."

Anyway, what we find in the gospels make it possible for us to agree that a gospel contains a sort of history of Jesus Christ which, however, is not wholly dependable. That is why some scholars say :

"The Gospels were not biographies, or memoirs, or even memorabilia, written by individuals as accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus; they were complications of traditional material handed down within the church, handed down orally and then later written out and compiled, in the interest of the church for its purpose of edification, worship, discipline, or defence. The purely literary interest was neither paramount nor primary. The name of the author or compiler is only accidentally retained, so to speak, or is added as an afterthought—as in the second century when the

¹ Ref. 7 : pp. 9, 17

gospels were being collected into a group, and separate names were required to distinguish them one from another, and when, nevertheless, the title of the group as a whole was 'The Gospel,' while the several books bore only the legend, 'according to' Mark, Luke, Matthew or John.'"²

In his preface to the commentary on Mark's Gospel, Dennis Nineham remarks:

"It is a striking fact that they (Gospels' writers) tell us nothing whatsoever about Our Lord's appearance, physique, and health, or for that matter, about his personality—whether, for example, he was a happy, carefree, placid man or the reverse. They do not even think to tell us definitely whether or not he was married! Likewise they give us no definite information about the length of his ministry or his age when he died, and there is no hint of the influence of his early environment upon him or of any development in his outlook or beliefs. From the point of view of the biographer the sheer amount of information the Evangelists give us is quite inadequate. It has been calculated that three or four weeks would suffice for everything related in Mark, except I¹³; as B.H. Streeter remarked: 'the total number of incidents recorded is so small that the gaps in the story must be the more considerable part of it' (The Four Gospels, p. 424).. The fact is that, for reasons which should now be clear, the Gospels are not themselves 'lives' of Jesus and scarcely provide the basis on which other people can write such 'lives.'"³

The Sources of the Gospels :

"That Matthew and Luke made use of Mark is generally recognized. Besides Mark they must also have used another document, now generally spoken of as Q, which formed the basis of their accounts of John the Baptist, the Temptation of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the story of the Centurion's boy, some Parables, some Sayings about the End.. We do not know what it did not contain, and we do not know its more striking peculiarities (which neither Matthew nor Luke saw fit to incorporate). It is therefore hazardous to estimate its historical and theological tendencies as a whole, e.g., as compared with Mark."⁴

² Ref. 4 : p. 26

³ Ref. 6 : p. 35

⁴ Ref. 17 Vol. 2, p. 523

Besides that lost source Q, scholars believe that there were other sources for the gospels, such as : M and L, from which both Matthew and Luke, obtained their special material.

As we have seen in the preceding section, the oral tradition was the original source from which early Christians derived their written material, especially in the period prior to the first Christian Writings, i.e. the Epistles of Paul. Paul began to write after more than 20 years of Christ's ascension.

In the words of Grant, we must remember, that:

“The existence of oral tradition is not only a basic presupposition of the written gospels (see once more the preface to Luke - Acts), whose form and contents can by no means be explained otherwise; but we actually have evidence of the existence of this tradition in the period prior to the earliest of them. Not only does the earliest preaching of the Christian message, reflected in the opening chapters of the book of Acts, imply the repetition of teaching about Jesus, his words and ‘mighty works;’ but in a famous passage in I Cor. 15 : 3, St. Paul reminds his readers that he ‘delivered to them first of all [or as of first importance] what he also had received.’”

So, the earliest Christian sources for a number of decades were oral tradition along with some lost gospels and books, some of which are referred to as : Q, M, and L.

Causes of Delay in Writing the Gospels :

The four canonical gospels have been written during a period of not less than 60 years. The most striking point is that no one gospel had been written during the earthly life of the Christ, or even directly after his ascension. Not less than 35 years had elapsed, when the oldest gospel, Mark's, began to be written. Scholars have investigated the causes of this delay:

“The delay in writing down this material, which seems so unnatural to modern readers.. is to be accounted for in several ways. That is, it was not just one but several factors in combination which made writing unlikely and delay inevitable.

⁷ Ref. 4 p 27

1. In the first place, the earliest Christians were not a literary, not even, for the most part, an educated group - as we should define 'educated.' 'Not many wise, according to worldly standards, not many powerful, not many of noble birth [are called]; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might shame the wise...' (I Cor. I : 26 ff.). They were the humble, the simple, the poor, and some of them were no doubt illiterate.. The earliest gospel (Mark) shows what rugged, homespun Greek was used; and with it tally the spelling and grammar of some of the early epitaphs.
2. Added to this, for the still earlier period of the preaching of the gospel in Palestine, was the custom of oral transmission of religious teaching.. There were many religious teachers in the Graeco - Roman world whose teachings never were handed down in written form but only orally, and so eventually left only the faded impression of a general point of view and a few scattered sayings often out of their original context, and hence difficult to interpret.
3. A third factor was the cost of materials - perhaps not prohibitive for the ordinary person, but certainly for the peniless.
4. Another factor, and one that had a very real bearing upon the production of written narratives of the life and teaching of our Lord, was the prevalent expectation of the Parousia — the 'coming' of the Lord in glory. If 'the end of all things' was at hand; if any day might be the last; if every event of importance in popular rumour or report might be of significance for the approaching end - then it is clear that those who shared such views would be in no frame of mind to write records of the past..
5. Finally, there was the difficulty of collecting data. How could the ordinary Christian find the time to go about collecting data for the life of Christ, or for the earliest period of the Church's life - as Hegesippus certainly did in the second century, and as Luke doubtless did in the first? By the time the need for written records had come to be felt - upon the death of those who had been 'eyewitnesses' as well as 'ministers of

⁸ Ref. 4 : pp. 28-30

the word'—the church has spread far beyond the borders of Palestine; and even within Palestine it had been 'scattered' more than once as a result of persecution."⁸

Early Christians faced persecution at the hands of the Jews. In Acts, we read such passages:

"And as they (Peter and John) were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sad'duces came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people.. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow.. On the morrow.. they conferred with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men?.. in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone' in this name.' So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." — Acts 5 : 1-18.

"And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samar'ia." — Acts 8 : 1

"About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword; and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.. intending after the passover to bring him out to the people." — Acts 12 : 1-4.

It is well known that the early years of Christianity were marked for persecution, which was one of the factors that prevented the new sect from paying attention to writing especially when it believed in the imminent end of the world followed by the final salvation.

But when that first generation was about to disappear, and there was no sign of the hope of the second coming being fulfilled then, the need for the written memoranda began to present itself. This was the burden left for the second Christian generation, of whom Mark and Luke took the major share.

The Gospel of Mark :

"Papias' statement of the tradition handed down from 'the Presbyter' is still the starting point for a satisfactory historical and

⁸ Ref. 4 : pp. 28-30

literary analysis of the Gospel of Mark, brief and anecdotal as the statement is:

This also the presbyter used to say : 'Mark, indeed, who had been the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, as far as he remembered them, the things said or done by the Lord, but not however in order.' For he had neither heard the Lord nor been his personal follower, but in a later stage, as I [Papias] said, he had followed Peter, who used to adapt the teachings to the needs, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the oracles of the Lord.. With them tallies the oft - quoted statement of Irenaeus : After the death [of Peter and Paul in the persecution at Rome under Nero], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed down to us in writing the things which Peter had proclaimed."⁹

To know who was that Mark, Nineham says:

"No one of that name is known to have been in specially close relationship with Our Lord or to have been particularly prominent in the early Church. It is less certain that the tradition is right in identifying the Mark who wrote the Gospel with the John Mark of Acts (e.g. 12^{12,23}, etc.) and the Mark of I Pet. 5¹³ (cf. also Col. 4¹⁰, 2 Tim. 4¹¹, Philem.²⁴). The early Church was in the habit of assuming that all occurrences of a given name in the New Testament referred to a single individual, but when we remember that Mark (Marcus) was the commonest Latin name in the Roman Empire and that the early Church must have contained innumerable Marks, we realize how precarious any assumption of identity is in this case."¹⁰

As regards the date when that gospel was written:

"It is frequently dated to the earlier part of the period A.D. 65-75, often to A.D. 65 or 66.. Many scholars feel that what Mark wrote there (in Chapter 13) could well have been written after A.D. 70."¹¹

And, with regard to the place of composition:

"About this, early Christian tradition gives little help. Papias and Irenaeus say nothing (though perhaps implying Rome), the

⁹ Ref. 4 : pp. 73-4

¹⁰ Ref. 6 : p. 39

¹¹ Ref. 6 : p. 42

anti - Marconite prologue (about A.D. 180?) says 'the regions of Italy,' Clement of Alexandria and Origen say Rome, and rather later, Chrysostom, with equal assurance says Egypt. In the absence of a clear lead from tradition, scholars have searched the Gospel itself for evidence. On this basis, several suggestions have been made - e.g. Antioch; but of all the places suggested Rome has been by far the most popular, and, so far as the evidence permits of any conclusion, it is **perhaps** the most likely."¹²

It is clear that **nobody** knows exactly who was that Mark whose name was attached or ascribed to that gospel, although it is widely accepted that he **was** one of the followers of Peter. It is noteworthy to refer, as **Frederick Grant** says, to:

"the impossible inference of Augustine that Mark was only 'one who followed **Matthew** and abridged his Gospel,' or the curious late 'tradition' which made Mark the evangelist of Alexandria and its first bishop."¹³

Likewise **nobody** knows exactly from where did that gospel come. Some say **Antioch**, or Egypt, or Rome. But the most popular conjecture is that it came from Rome.

Problems of Mark's Gospel:

This gospel — like the other gospels — presents some serious **problems**, one of which is that different manuscripts have different texts. **Nineham** says:

"Readers will **also** realize that the Gospel was originally written by hand and that for centuries all copies had to be made by hand. Inevitably changes, both intentional and unintentional, crept in, and, of the hundreds of manuscripts (that is, hand - written copies) of Mark that have survived, no two agree exactly."¹⁵

Another serious problem in Mark is about its ending, which is considered not original, but a second - century appendix to the gospel. The last chapter - No.16 - contains 20 verses, but those from 9 to 20 are treated by some modern English translations of the

¹² Ref. 6 : p. 42

¹³ Ref. 4 : p. 74

¹⁵ Ref 6 p 11

Bible, viz. the R.S.V., as spurious and are relegated to the margin. This problem will be thoroughly discussed when we come to the Resurrection and Appearance. But we can mention now some variant endings of this gospel—other than VV. 9 - 20.

“After V. 14 one Greek MS. of the fifth century includes an additional passage which is also quoted in part by Jerome as being in some of the MSS. with which he was familiar.. The Greek, which in one place has to be restored on the basis of the quotation in Jerome, and in any case not entirely clear, must have meant something like this:

And they replied saying : This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who by means of evil spirits prevents the true power of God from being apprehended; therefore reveal thy righteousness now. They were speaking to Christ, and Christ to them in reply. The limit of the years of the authority of Satan has expired. Other ancient authorities add after verse 8 the following:

But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.”¹⁶

It is thus clear that nobody knows exactly what was the true ending of Mark's gospel; and that the mystery that surrounds its ending does not differ from that which surrounds the writer, Mark, whose name came to be attached to this gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew:

“The author of Matthew is no doubt a Jew. Unlike Mark, who does not understand ‘the Jews’ and has little sympathy with them, and unlike Luke, who understands them well enough and recognizes the strength and beauty of their faith but whose cultural background is the broad world of the Roman Empire and eastern Hellenism, Matthew understands the Jews and sympathizes with their outlook as only a born Jew can do. Even his bitter tirades against the Pharisees and their ‘hypocrisy’ do not obscure for him the fact that ‘not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the Law till all be fulfilled’ (5 : 18).. He has no sympathy with the ‘emancipated’

¹⁶ Ref. 6 : pp. 452-3

type of Christian, to whose attitudes and behaviour Paul's Gospel seems to have lent unfortunate encouragement. Though it is scarcely possible to see an allusion to Paul in the one who is 'least in the Kingdom of Heaven,' who has taught men to ignore the minute requirements of the Law (5-19), still it is clear that Paul the Hellenist and Matthew the Jewish evangelist faced in almost opposite directions in their view of Jesus' work and teaching."¹⁹

"In this short section the author mentions himself or rather, he describes the calling of one who was called Matthew, though as we have seen, his identity with this disciple is almost certainly a fiction. The disciple will be mentioned by name only once more in this book, at 10³, in the list of the twelve apostles : Matthew the tax collector.

Matthew has omitted Mark 2¹³, (an editorial verse, describing the teaching of the Jesus by the sea), and has here copied out Mark 2¹⁴, with this important alteration : Mark's, 'he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus'—he has changed to : 'he saw a man called Matthew.' Levi was not mentioned again in Mark— he was not included in the list of the twelve in Mark 3¹⁶⁻¹⁹ though 'Matthew' was. Why did our evangelist make this change here? There is no evidence that 'Matthew' was the 'Christian' name of 'Levi.' Possibly (though this is pure conjecture) there was some connexion between the apostle Matthew and the Church for which this Gospel was written; and the author of this Gospel attributed his work to the founder or to teacher of the Church who had borne his name. (A similar situation may lie behind the connexion between the Johannine writings and the apostle John.) The evangelist may have used the opportunity which Mark gave him, for rewriting the call of a disciple, to tie it up more closely with the list of the twelve whom he venerated as the apostle of the Church to which he belonged."²⁰

With respect to the date of writing this gospel, it may be said that :

"Matthew's Gospel was written between about A.D. 85 and 105; perhaps, however, the most we can say so far is that it was written in the last quarter of the first century, or in the early years of the second."²¹

¹⁹ Ref. 4 : pp. 140-1

²⁰ Ref. 7 : p. 136

²¹ Ref. 7 : p. 11

And with respect to the place of composition:

“A strong case has been made for Antioch as the home of the Matthean Gospel; to Antioch points the marked emphasis upon Peter, who was a great figure in the Antiochene Church.. Equally suitable would be some place in the neighbourhood, somewhere in northern Palestine or Syria.”²²

Problems of Matthew’s Gospel:

There are few problems about this gospel too. Three of which are serious:

1. The False Fulfilment of the Scriptures:

It is known that the writer of Matthew’s gospel was fond of connecting the whole story of Christ with what he considered prior prophecies in the Old Testament. This led him to inevitable faults. However this subject will be treated fully in section 4.

2. The Imminent End of the World:

Although this belief influenced the entire thinking of the New Testament authors, Matthew was the most prominent to assert it. He had expected the imminent end “before the apostles would have had time to preach in all the towns of Israel (10 : 23); before some of Jesus’ contemporaries had died (16 : 28); before that generation had passed away (24 : 34). And it is clear that it did not happen as Matthew expected.”²³

3. The Suspected Ending of the Gospel:

Matthew’s gospel ends : “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..” Scholars have their doubts about this ending and consider it as a later addition.

Adolf Harnack says:

“It cannot be directly proved that Jesus instituted baptism, for Matth. XXVIII. 19, is not a saying of the Lord. The reasons for this assertion are :

²² Ref. 4 : p. 140

²³ Ref. 7 : p.21

- (1) It is only a later stage of the tradition that represents the risen Christ as delivering speeches and giving commandments. Paul knows nothing of it.
- (2) The Trinitarian formula is foreign to the mouth of Jesus, and has not the authority in the Apostolic age which it must have had if it had descended from Jesus himself.”²⁶

So among the disciples of Jesus there was a tax collector called Matthew, whose name is ascribed to one of the gospels, which is considered an enlarged copy of Mark's gospel. It is probable that it was written in Antioch or in a nearby region, in the period A.D. 85-105, i.e. more than 50 years after the departure of the Christ.

The Gospel of Luke:

In an introduction to his gospel, Luke records what was happening in the dawn of Christianity with respect to the compiling of gospels. He wrote:

“In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for sometime past, to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theoph'ilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.”— 1 : 14.

From this introductory passage, we can conclude the following:

1. That Luke was writing a mere personal letter to his ‘most excellent Theoph'ilus,’ and that the message was written successively, whenever it was possible to do.
2. That the work of Luke was undertaken through a mere personal motive, only aiming that his friend ‘may know the truth concerning the things of which (he has) been informed.’ Luke was honest in stating that it seemed good to him to write an orderly account. He never claimed that what he wrote was revealed to him, nor was it written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All what he had written was the result of ‘having

²⁶ Ref. 13 · Vol. 1, p. 79

followed all things closely for sometime past.' All the information came to him through his personal activity.

3. Moreover, Luke reports that 'many have undertaken to compile' narratives, which were claimed later to be gospels. And he is quite clear in reporting that he had never personally seen the Christ, because he was of the second generation. It is known that the long message of Luke was divided into two : the first was Luke's gospel, and the second the Acts of the Apostles, the longest book of the New Testament. Scholars have tried to identify who that Theophi'lus was but with no success.

Frederic Grant comments:

"We are not told who Theophilus was : presumably he may have been a Roman official, perhaps in some provincial city—not necessarily in Rome or even in Italy.. Nor are we told who were the 'many' who had taken in hand to draw up similar narratives..

Luke was not only a historian; he was also a poet.. There is of course a large amount of poetry in the old evangelic tradition—for Jesus also was a poet.. Though we are dealing with probabilities, not certainties, it is not impossible that the author of Luke gathered his material in Palestine or Syria early in the decade 70-80, if not before; then (on the Proto-Luke hypothesis) combined with the major portion of Mark sometime in the seventies, and issued his gospel about 80 or 85 (his reference to the Fall of Jerusalem is still vivid). Later, perhaps five years later, he supplemented the original writing with a second treatise, which we know as Acts, designed to answer the questions of educated and perhaps highly placed Roman officials like Theophilus, and issued the whole work about 95."²⁷

In his introduction to Luke's gospel, George Caird states:

"A study of the Gospel enables us to describe in some detail the man who wrote it. He was a second-generation Christian.. His command of Greek, his constant interest in Gentiles, and his avoidance of matter of purely Jewish interest may be taken as indications that he himself was a Gentile..

²⁷ Ref. 4 : pp. 121-8

In Acts there are certain passages where the narrator switches abruptly from the third person to the first person plural (16¹⁰⁻¹⁷, 20⁸-21¹⁸, 27¹-28¹⁶), and these 'We' sections can be plausibly explained only on the assumption that the author is using his own or somebody else's diary. But the 'we' sections are written in a style indistinguishable from the style of the rest of the book. If, then, we suppose that the author was using as one of his sources a diary written by a companion of Paul, we must add that he rewrote it so thoroughly as to eliminate all traces of its original style and yet so carelessly that he did not always remember to make the change from first to third person.. German and American scholars have on the whole favoured the theory that the author of the diary and the author of Luke-Acts were two different people, because Acts seemed to them to be at so many points in irreconcilable conflict with the evidence of the Pauline Epistles that they could not believe that it came from the hand of one who had personal acquaintance with Paul and his missionary work.. What then was the author's name?

The uniform belief of ancient writers is that he was Luke, the doctor whom Paul mentions as his companion and colleague (Col. 4¹⁴, Philem. 24, 2 Tim. 4¹¹).

Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome all hold Luke to be the author, and the last two add that he came from Antioch..

Luke can scarcely be described as a prominent figure in the annals of first-century Christianity."²⁸

Problems of Luke's Gospel

1. "The text of Luke's Gospel has been subject to the same vicissitudes as that of the other books of the New Testament.. The Western text of Luke and Acts exhibits some striking divergences, by way of addition and subtraction, from the Alexandrian and Byzantine texts."³⁰
2. There is that striking problem of the divergence of genealogy of Christ mentioned in Luke, when compared with that of both : Matthew and I Chronicles. This problem will be fully treated later.

²⁸ Ref. 8 · pp 15-7

³⁰ Ref 8 · pp 12-4

The Gospel of John

Frederic Grant says:

“The Gospel of John is a dramatic presentation of the life, ministry, death and glorification of Jesus for purpose of both instruction and worship within the church, and for interpretation and propaganda outside. It is concerned with issues which had arisen in the gentile Christian world of the late first or early second century, when a theory known as Docetism was spreading here and there—a theory which attempted to do honour to Christ but only by making Him unreal, a phantom, the temporary manifestation of a divine being who could neither suffer nor die..

For a long time it had been held that John was fully aware of the existence of the three synoptics, and wrote only to supplement or—in one or two cases—to correct them. It was thought that the cleansing of the temple, for example, had purposely been placed by John at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry—for then, as the aged John recalled, was when it had taken place. The date of Crucifixion he similarly corrected, placing it on the eve of Passover—the day the Paschal lambs were slain..

On the other hand, the title ‘Son of Man’ (which Paul never uses) is retained by John.”³²

The Encyclopedia Americana records:

“The Christian faith could not penetrate the Graeco-Roman world without the strength of its Judaistic heritage or without some imprint from the new cultural environment. Greek influence has long been assumed, not without evidence : the first verses, for instance, are obviously in the manner of a Stoic Poem on the Logos..

Indeed Logos, as the Word of God, may have had in the author’s mind the coloration rather of the Old Testament ‘Word of God.’”³³

“John ‘was a Christian—and moreover, he was a Hellenist—probably not a Jew, but a Levantine or Greek. There are no tears in his eyes when he writes of the self-condemnation of the ‘Jews,’ as there were in the eyes of the old scribe who wrote ‘Matthew.’ Nor could he have shared Paul’s readiness to be ‘anathema’ for his people’s sake..

³² Ref. 4 : pp. 2-3. 156.161

³³ Ref. 16 : Vol. 16, p. 159

The Gospel (of John may have been written, in) Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria, even Rome is a possible location. Every one of these cities was a centre for religious propaganda in the first two centuries, and they were all in constant intercommunication."³⁴

John Marsh, in his commentary on the gospel of John, under the title : 'The Impossibility of Certainty,' writes:

"In coming to a discussion of the interesting and complicated questions about the fourth evangelist and his gospel one admission is properly and profitably made at the start : there is no problem of 'introduction' about which a certain solution can be found. Who was the 'John' named as the author? Where did he live? For what audience did he write? What sources did he use? When was his work written? About all these questions, and about a good many more, there are divergent judgements sometimes put forward with great assurance; yet none can claim certainty."³⁵

Then John Marsh finishes his preface, saying:

"When all is said and done, then, it is difficult if not impossible to achieve anything more than probability about the various 'critical' introductory problems about John. The present writer believes that it is not impossible to hold, and quite possible to be true, that during the last decade of the first century A.D. a certain John, possibly John Mark, with access to a large amount of material about Jesus, and knowing probably one and possibly more of our synoptic gospels, wrote down a new form of the story of Jesus for his own community, which was both cosmopolitan and affected by the presence of disciples of John the Baptist."³⁶

Problems of John's Gospel:

The Encyclopedia Americana records:

"The Gospel of John, long credited rightly or wrongly to the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' is for many the 'well-loved Gospel,' but scholars reverently discuss it also as part of 'the Johannine problem.' There are valid reasons for this debate. First, there is the striking dissimilarity between John's Gospel and the Synoptics..

³⁴ Ref. 4 : pp. 174, 178

³⁵ Ref. 18 : p. 20

³⁶ Ref. 18 : p. 81

The Synoptics proceed in the Markan chronology and make Galilee the main local, while John implies that Judea is the central setting of the ministry of Jesus. A second item in the problem concerns the last chapter. Even the general reader can see that the Gospel ends in a final great chord with chapter 20 : 'These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.' That declaration sets forth the purpose of the book. Then follows a chapter which tells that Jesus appeared as Resurrection Lord to five disciples and a mysterious "two others," that he guided them to a miraculus catch of fishes, and that he commissioned Peter to 'feed my sheep.' Then follows a passage which may hint the early martyrdom of John (21 : 23) and an enigmatic note : 'This is the disciple which testifies of these things.. and we know that his testimony is true.' The last chapter evidently came from the group here named 'we' .. These 'we' redactors are indeed hard to identify."³⁸

There seems to be some affinity of John's gospel with that of Luke's : "both agree that there was a second Judas among the twelve (Luke 6¹², John 14²²); the betrayal was due to Satan's entry into Judas Iscariot (Luke 22³, John 13²⁷).. All this could be explained by the assumption that John was using Luke's Gospel as a source, but this theory is totally inadequate to account for the rest of the evidence. For both Gospels contain a story of Peter and a miraculous catch of fish, but one places it early in the Galilean ministry, the other after the resurrection (Luke 5¹⁻¹¹, John 21¹⁻¹⁴). Both tell in a remarkably similar language how Jesus was anointed by a woman, but in the one case it was by a prostitute in the house of a Pharisee and in the other it was by a close friend in her own home (Luke 7³⁶⁻³⁸ John 12¹⁻⁴). Both are aware of Jesus' friendship with Martha and Mary, though the illustrations they provide are quite different (Luke 10³⁸⁻⁴², John 11¹⁻⁴⁴).. The unavoidable inference is that Luke and John were relying on two allied streams of oral tradition."³⁹

The main problem of John's gospel is that nobody knows exactly by whom, where and when was it exactly written; moreover it is a book quite contradictory to its other brothers, the synoptic gospels, in doctrines and accounts.



³⁸ Ref. 16 : Vol. 16, p. 199

³⁹ Ref. 8 : pp. 20-1

Chapter 2

Main Problems of the Gospels

- Numerous Disagreements
- Errors in Testimonies of the Old Testament.**

NUMEROUS DISAGREEMENTS

We have already shown briefly the general headlines of the four gospels, their sources, the circumstances of their compiling and becoming canonical. We have also mentioned some of the problems concerning each gospel.

But when we look into these gospels as a principal source of the Christian belief, we are confronted with a number of problems concerning the following:

(i) Numerous disagreements, (ii) Errors in testimonies of the Old Testament, (iii) The case of Crucifixion, (iv) And the case of Resurrection and Appearance.

Problems (i) and (ii) will be discussed in a separate section, but problems (iii) and (iv) on account of their highly important subject matter will be dealt within a separate chapter.

In this third section, we are going to study the problem of numerous disagreements or the differing versions that are found in the four gospels.

1. The Genealogy of Christ

According to Matthew the genealogy of Christ is traced back from Abraham to Joseph, 'the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born.' This Matthian genealogy descends as follows:

“Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob.. of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron .. of Ram .. of Ammin'adab, .. of Nahshon .. of Salmon .. of Bo'az by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse .. of David the king .. of Solomon by the wife of Uri'ah, and Solomon the father of Rehobo'am .. of Abi'jah .. of Asa .. of Jehosh'aphat .. of Joram .. of Uzzi'ah .. of Jotham .. of Ahaz .. of Hezeki'ah .. of Manas'seh .. of Amos .. of Josi'ah .. of Jechoni'ah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon : Jechoni'ah was the father of She - al'ti - el .. of Zerub'babel .. of Abi'ud .. of Eli'akim .. of Azor .. of Zadok .. of Achim .. of Eli'ud .. of Elea'zar .. of Matthan .. of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ fourteen generations." — 1 : 1-17.

John Fenton writes:

"Matthew believed that Jesus was both descended from David, and conceived by the Holy Spirit. He therefore shows that Joseph, who married Mary, was the 'son of David' (1:20); and that Jesus was conceived 'before they came together' (1:18). Jesus was in this way both 'the son of David' and miraculously conceived."¹

Matthew and Luke were the only evangelists who wrote down the genealogy of Christ. While tracing the Lucan genealogy, we find it ascending from Joseph the husband of Mary to Abraham as follows:

"Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Marthat.. of Levi.. of Melchi.. of Jan'na-i.. of Joseph.. of Mat-tathi'as.. of Amos.. of Nahum.. of Esli.. of Nag'ga-i.. of Ma'ath.. of Mattathi'as.. of Sem'e-in.. of Josech.. of Joda.. of Jo-an'an.. of Rhesa.. of Zerub'babel.. of Sheal'ti-el.. of Neri.. of Melchi.. of Addi.. of Cosam.. of Elma'dam.. of Er.. of Joshua.. of Elie'zer.. of Jorim.. of Mat-that.. of Levi.. of Simeon.. of Judah.. of Joseph.. of Jonam.. of Eli'akim.. of Me'le-a.. of Menna.. of Mat'tatha.. of Nathan.. of David.. of Jesse.. of Obed.. of Bo'az.. of Sala.. of Nahshon.. of Ammin'adab.. of Admin.. of Arni.. of Hezron.. of Perez.. of Juda.. of Jacob.. of Isaac, the son of Abraham." — 3 : 23-34.

The genealogy of the Fathers is mentioned in the Old Testament, especially : Genesis and I Chronicles. Now to know, the exact genealogy of Christ as mentioned in the Bible, it will be sufficient to trace it from David to Joseph, husband of Mary, according to : I

¹ Ref. 7.: p. 40

Chronicles 3, Matthew 1, and Luke 3, in a tabulated form as shown below:

| No | Matthew | I Chronicles | Luke | No. | Matthew | I Chronicles | Luke |
|----|--------------|--------------------|---------------|-----|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | David | David | David | 22 | Zerub'habel | Zerub'habel | Sheal'ti-el |
| 2 | Solomon | Sol- OZMON than | Na- Nathan | 23 | Abi'ud | Hanani'ah | Zerub'babe |
| 3 | Rehobo'am | Rehobo'am | Mat'tatha | 24 | Eli'akim | | Rhesa |
| 4 | Abi'jah | Abi'jah | Menna | 25 | Azor | | Jo-an'an |
| 5 | Asa | Asa | Me'le-a | 26 | Zadok | | Joda |
| 6 | Jehosh'aphat | Jehosh'aphat | Eli'akim | 27 | Achim | | Josech |
| 7 | Joram | Joram | Jonam | 28 | Eli'ud | | Sem'e-in |
| 8 | Uzzi'ah | Ahazi'ah | Joseph | 29 | Elea'zar | | Mattathi'as |
| 9 | — | Jo'ash | Judah | 30 | Matthan | | Ma'ath |
| 10 | — | Amazi'ah | Simeon | 31 | Jacob | | Nag'ga-i |
| 11 | — | Azari'ah | Levi | 32 | Joseph | | Esli |
| 12 | Jotham | Jotham | Matthat | 33 | | | Nahum |
| 13 | Ahaz | Ahaz | Jorim | 34 | | | Amos |
| 14 | Hezeki'ah | Hezeki'ah | Elie'zer | 35 | | | Mattathi'as |
| 15 | Manas'seh | Manas'seh | Joshua | 36 | | | Joseph |
| 16 | Amos | Amon | Er | 37 | | | Jan'na-i |
| 17 | Josi'ah | Josi'ah | Elma'dam | 38 | | | Mekchi |
| 18 | — | Jehoi'akim | Cosam | 39 | | | Levi |
| 19 | Jechoni'ah | Jeconi'ah | Addi | 40 | | | Matthat |
| 20 | She-al'ti-el | She-al'ti-el | Mekchi | 41 | | | Heli |
| 21 | — | ... | Neri | 42 | | | Joseph |

The basis of comparison of both Matthew and Luke will be I Chronicles. But it should be noted that in regard to different translations of the Bible, I Chron 3 : 17 - 24 are confusing verses, written carelessly in the original manuscripts.

According to (i) the Authorised Version (A.V.), (ii) its Arabic translation known as the Protestant Version (A.T.), (iii) the Revised Standard Version (R.S.V.), and (iv) the French translation known as Traduction Oecume'nique de la Bible (T.O.B.), we have I Chron 3 : 16 - 19 as follows:

— V.16 :

Generally agreed in the four translations, but A.T. is quite clear in reporting : 'And the two sons of Jehoiakim : Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son.'

— V.17 :

"And the sons of Jeconiah; Assir, Salathiel his son," (A.V.)

“And the two sons of Jeconiah; Assir and Salathiel his son.” (A. T.). “And the sons of Jeconiah, the captive : She-al-ti-el his son,” (R.S.V.)

“Fils de Yekonya Prisonnier : Shaltiel son fils,” (T.O.B.) So the latest translations : R.S.V. and T.O.B. made a correction to A.V. and A.T., which shows that V. 17 mentions only one son of Jeconiah, whose name was She-al’ti-el.

The error in the old translations, as I believe, is due to confusion in dealing with the word : ‘Assir,’ which was thought to be the name of the first son of Jeconiah, but it is supposed to be an Aramaic word, which means captive, and that was the cause of the correction made by R.S.V. and T.O.B. It should be noted that the word ‘Assir’ in Arabic also means captive and Aramaic and Arabic belong to what is called the family of Semitic languages.

— V.18:

Generally agreed, but A.V. is clear in reporting that the six mentioned names are ‘also’ sons of Jeconiah.

— V.19:

Generally agreed, but the A.T. is clear in reporting that : ‘the two sons of Pedaiiah were Zerubbabel, and Shimei.’

We have noted that:

1. She-al’ti-el was a son of Jeconiah (V. 17).
2. Also Pedaiiah was another son of Jeconiah (V. 18).
3. Zerub’babel was a son of Pedaiiah (V. 19).
4. It is also mentioned in other passages of the Old Testament that Zerub’babel was a son of She-al’ti-el (Neh 12 : 1). That is why a gap is left in the I Chronicles’ column, No.21, indicating this confusion, expressed clearly by T.O.B. in saying : “On ignore l’origine de la liste donne’e dans les V.17-24.”

Whatever the case, in the comparison of the genealogy of the Christ mentioned in either the Old or the New Testament, we are bound to face this gap. Looking at the previous table, the reader can discover some serious differences. Commentators have spoken of these differences, of whom John Fenton says:

“Matthew has probably continued to draw upon I Chron

(3^{5,10-16}), but has omitted three generations between 'Joram' and 'Jotham,' and omitted 'Jehoiakin' after 'Josiah.' Luke's genealogy is traced through another son of David, namely 'Nathan' (Luke 3³¹; I Chron. 3³).. Matthew was able to take the first three names, 'Jechoniah, 'Shelatiel,' and Zerubbabel' from I Chron. 3^{16 ff.}; but for the remainder of the list Matthew had, as far as we know, no written source. Luke also has 'Shealtiel' and 'Zerubbabel' in his genealogy, but none of the others (Luke 3²⁷)..

Matthew now looks back over the genealogy, and points out that in each of the three ages there were 'fourteen' generations' (though in fact he has only thirteen names in the last period. I 12 - 16)."³

What George Caird says on the subject is as under:

"In the middle of this list (of Luke) occur the three names 'Joanun, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel.' But Joanan is only another form of the name Hananiah, and Hananiah was the son of Zerubbabel; there never was such a person as Rhesa (I Chron.3¹⁹). Rhesa is the Aramaic word for prince, and in the original list it must have been appended as a title to the name of Zerubbabel, the only man who could conceivably have been so designated after 586 B.C. The error which has crept into the Lucan list could have occurred only if the original list was compiled in the reverse order—'Zerubbabel the prince beget Joanan.' All this leads to the conclusion that Luke was using a document, originally compiled in Aramaic, which traced the descent of Jesus back through David to Abraham, and that he himself completed the list by tracing the descent beyond Abraham to Adam."⁴

Considering I Chronicles the basis for comparison, we have the following:

1. Matthew was mistaken in his genealogy, as he dropped, at least, four generations, i.e. nos. 9,10,11 and 18.
2. Luke was mistaken, at least, when he inserted Rhesa (No. 24), which was nothing but a title.
3. Matthew's genealogy is in significant contrast with Luke's, as the first makes Joseph, husband of Mary, descend from David through his son Solomon, while Luke joins Joseph with David through his other son Nathan.

³ Ref. 7 : pp. 39-40

⁴ Ref. 8 : p. 19

4. As both Matthew and Luke were making their lists from different sources, mistakes piled to the extent that from David to Joseph, Matthew wrote down 27 generations, while those of Luke were 42 generations.

Moreover, joining Christ with Joseph whatever the true genealogy was, created a shameful religious problem. According to Deut. 23 : 2 - 3 :

“No bastard shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord. No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none belonging to them shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever.”

In Matthew's genealogy, four women are mentioned, each of whom has a shameful history for her relation with adultery. John Fenton says:

“ ‘Tamar’ is the first of the four women who are mentioned in the genealogy. She was the daughter - in - law of Juda, by whom she conceived twins, Perez and Zerah, through deceiving Judah as to her identity; see Gen. 38.

‘Rahab, the second woman in the list, is presumably the harlot at Jericho, though there is no evidence apart from this verse that she was the wife of Salmon and the mother of Boaz; see Joshua 2, 6²²⁻²³.

‘Ruth,’ the third woman in the genealogy, was a Moabite and not a descendant of Abraham; see Ruth I⁴, 4¹⁰.

‘the wife of Uriah’ : Matthew's expression here emphasizes the sin of David; but in fact Uriah was dead, through David's orders, before Solomon was conceived; see Samuel II, 12.”⁵

According to Genesis 19 : 30-38 :

“Now Lot went up out of Zo'ar and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters.. in a cave. And the first-born said to the younger, ‘Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.’ So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father.. and the younger arose, and lay with him.. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by

⁵Ref. 7 : pp. 38-9

their father. The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites.. The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites.”

So Ruth, the Moabite, the grand-mother of David and his descendants was the fruit of a shameful adultery of prophet Lot with his first-born daughter!!!

A question now arises : Is it just and fair to make the genealogy of the Christ through his mother Mary, or through her husband Joseph, whose ancestors' names were tarnished with adultery?

The answer is quite clear.

Mary was a kinswoman of Zachari'ah's wife, one 'of the daughters of Aaron'.. It should be sufficient to say “Christ, son of Mary, Messenger of God.” Mary was a descendant of Aaron, a holy house appointed by the Lord 'to serve as priests.' - Ex 28 : 1

It may be noted that in the dawn of Christianity, there was a gospel extant, bearing the name : The Gospel of the Birth of Mary, attributed to St. Matthew, and accepted as genuine and authentic by several of the ancient Christian sects. It is to be found in the works of Jerome, a Father of the Church, who flourished in the fourth century. “From that Gospel, the learned Faustus, a native of Britain, who became Bishop of Riez, in Provence endeavoured to prove that Christ was not of the house of David and tribe of Judah, because according to that Gospel he cited, the Virgin herself was not of this tribe, but of the tribe of Levi; her father being a priest of the name of Joachim.”⁶

Accordingly it would be more proper, just and fair to call Christ “the son of Mary, the Messenger of God” than anything else.

2. The Names of the Apostles

Matthew says in 10 : 2-4 :

“The names of the twelve apostles are these : first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zeb'edee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus, Simon the cananaean, and Juda Iscariot, who betrayed him.”

This agrees with Mark 3 : 16-19.

⁶ Ref. 2 : p. 17

But in Luke 6 : 14-16, we have : "Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

John mentions some of these names, among which there is another Judas of whom he says : "Judas (not Iscariot)." — 14 : 22.

It is clear that, as regards the names of the apostles, both Matthew and Mark do not agree with that mentioned by both Luke and John. That is why George Caird says:

"When the Gospels were written there was not even complete certainty about their identity. Judas the son of James does not appear in the lists of Mark and Matthew, where his place is taken by Thaddæus-Lebaeus."

Also 'Judas not Iscariot' is mentioned in some versions, once as 'Judas the brother of James' (A.V.), in other as : 'Judas the son of the James' (R.S.V.)

3. Different Narratives

(i) The Fig Tree:

Matthew says : "And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-exchangers.. And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

In the morning as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it they marvelled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?' And Jesus answered them, 'Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt.. even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will be done.'" — 21 : 12-21.

About this incident, Mark says:

"On the following day when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to

⁵ Ref. 4 : p. 100.

it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it..

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers.. And when evening came they went out of the city.

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, 'Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered.' And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.' -12 : 12-23.

It is clear that the two narratives are divergent:

1. Matthew records that cleansing of the temple has taken place before the Christ passed by the fig tree. In Mark, it is different.
2. The detail of the incident of the fig tree is quite different as is recorded in each of the gospels.

John Fenton summarizes the disagreements as follows:

"In Mark, Jesus looks for fruit on the tree, and 'curses' it, on one day (Monday, according to R.S.V.); then on the next day (Tuesday) Peter draws Jesus' attention to it (Mark 11^{12ff.} 20ff.). The result of Matthews re-arrangement here is that the whole incident takes place on the same day."⁷

(ii) The Asking of the Two Sons of Zebedee:

Mark says, 10 : 35-37 :

"And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask you.' And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.'"

But Matthew says, 20 : 20-21 :

"Then the mother of the sons of Zeb'edee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked him for something.

⁷ Ref. 7 : 336

And he said to her, what do you want?' She said to him, 'Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.'

"Matthew has made some changes and omissions in Mark 10^{30f}, the most important is that whereas in mark, the two disciples themselves made the request, in Matthew it is their mother who comes to Jesus and (a characteristic of this Gospel) kneels before him."⁸

(iii) The Mad, the Blind, and the Ass:

Mark says, 5 : 2-13 :

"And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.. And when he saw Jesus from afar.. Crying out with a loud voice.. I adjure you by God, do not torment me. For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many'.. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, 'Send us to the swine, let us enter them'.. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea."

And Luke, 8 : 27 :

"And as he stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but among the tombs."

But, **Matthew's** account is, 8 : 28-32

"And when he came.. two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs.. And behold, they cried out, 'What have you to do with us.. Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance.. And the demons begged him, 'If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.. and behold, the whole herd rushed down.. and perished in the water.'"

⁸ Ref. 7 : p. 32c

“Notice that Matthew has increased the number of the demoniacs from one to two.”

Mark writes, 10 : 46-52 :

“And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho.. Bartima’cus, a blind beggar.. was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!.. And Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.”

Luke says, 18 : 35-38 :

“As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside.. And he cried, ‘Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!’”

But Matthew’s account is, 20 : 29-34 :

“And as they went out of Jericho.. two blind men sitting by the roadside.. cried out, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’.. And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they received their sight and followed him.”

Here also Matthew has increased the number of the blind men, mentioned single in both Mark and Luke, to two.

About the entry of Christ in Jerusalem, Mark says:

“And when they drew near to Jerusalem.. He sent two of his disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the village.. you will find a colt tied.. untie it and bring it.. And they went away, and found a colt tied.. and they untied it.. And they brought the colt to Jesus.” — 11 : 1-7.

On this subject Luke says, 19 : 29-35 :

“When he drew near to Beth’phage.. he sent two of the disciples, saying, ‘Go into the village.. you will find a colt tied.. untie it.. So those who were sent away.. brought it to Jesus.”

John’s Version: 12 : 14 :

“And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written.”

But Matthew says, 21 : 1-7 :

“And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to

* Ref. 7 : p. 132

Beth'phage.. Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.. The disciples went.. brought the ass and the colt.' Matthew's " 'an ass tied, and a colt with her' may be contrasted with Mark's 'a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat.' "¹⁰

4. Repulsive Narratives

(i) John the Baptist and the Christ

There is no doubt that 'John the Baptist and the Christ were close relatives and were of the same generation. Besides, John as a prophet was 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way.' John came to prepare for the ministry of the Christ, who never began it before he had been baptized by John in the Jordan. When "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him, John would have prevented him-saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him." Mt 3 : 13-16

All the gospels are agreed on that. But both Matthew and Luke had forgotten this and tell us that John the Baptist was still inquiring about the identity of Christ.

"Now when John heard in prison about the ~~deeds~~ of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see : the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them," — Mt 11 : 2-6; Lk 7 : 19-22

John's imprisonment was for about one and a half years and he was not treated badly in the prison, as is stated by Mark:

"Herod (the King) feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe." — 6 : 20

John was captured by king Herod who:

¹⁰ Mt. 23: 23

“had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Hero’di - as, his brother, Philip’s wife; because he had married her. For John said to Herod, ‘it is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’.” — Mk 6 : 17-18

John Fenton comments on this paragraph saying:

“Mark was almost certainly wrong in saying that Herodias was the wife of ‘Philip’ : She was the wife of another Herod who was half-brother to Herod Antipas. The omission of the ‘Philip’ in a few of the authorities from the text here may be a later attempt to correct this mistake, in which Matthew followed Mark.”¹¹

(ii) Peter and the Christ :

“And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the village of Caesare’a Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ And they told him, ‘John the Baptist; and others say, Eli’jah; and others one of the prophets.’ And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’ And he charged them to tell no one about him.” — Mk 8 : 27-30; Mt.16 : 13-17. Matthew adds to this, that due to that confession of Peter, Christ rewarded him saying:

“And Jesus answered him ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona.. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” — 16 : 17-19

It is clear from this that Peter became the agent of the Christ with full authority to say and do whatsoever he liked. But a couple of verses subsequent to the grant of that holy agency, only mentioned by Matthew, it is mentioned that Peter was called by the Christ as Satan!

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes.. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are hin-

¹¹ Ref. 7 : pp. 240-1

“Grace to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of Men.” Mt 16 : 21-23.

The Christ had uttered a similar expression to the real Satan : ‘Begone, Satan!’ when he was under temptation.

Thus it is seen that Matthew forgot what he had written about Peter earlier in the very chapter, that is why we find Peter being mentioned as the agent of Christ at one moment and at the other as Satan!

At the beginning of his ministry, Christ taught his disciples, including Peter, the ideal behavior of the apostles and missionaries, saying:

“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before man, the Son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” - Lk 12 : 8-9; Mt 10 : 32-33.

And in the end of his ministry, the Christ said to his twelve apostles, including Peter:

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep the flock will be scattered’.. Peter declared to him, ‘Though they fall away because of you, I will never fall away.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.’—Mt 26 : 31-35; Mk 14 : 27-31; Lk 22 : 33-34.

The gospels agree that this prophecy was fulfilled. For, in the critical hours:

“Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.. But Peter followed him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.. And a maid came up to him, and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you mean.’ And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders. ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ And again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to peter, ‘Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began

to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know the man.' Mt 26 : 56-74; Mk 14 : 66-71; Lk 22 : 54-60.

So Peter had fallen away, and consequently will fall in hell, after being denied by the Christ before God, as a fulfilment of that so-called prophecy!

(iii) The Appearance After the Resurrection :

About Christ's appearance after the resurrection, Mark says:

"Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene.. She went and told those who had been with him.. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

After this he appeared in another form to two of them they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them."—16 : 9-13.

However, according to Luke:

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us.. Jesus himself drew near and went with them.. And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, 'The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!'" — 24 : 13-34

This means that ¹²Mark's 16 : 13, is in contrast with Luke's 24 : 34.¹²

According to Mark, the disciples and those with them never believed in the risen Lord, neither before those two had told them, nor even after that.

But according to Luke, the eleven and those who were with them, believed in Christ's rising and appearance to Simon before the information of those two who returned to Jerusalem. "Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread!"

¹² Ref 8 p 45.

5. Distortion of the Christ's Titles and the Key Words :

We have already mentioned that scholars believe that:

“When St. Matthew and St. Luke were writing they both had copies of Mark in front of them and incorporated almost the whole of it into their Gospels.”¹³

A simple comparison of the synoptics show that:

“Ninety percent of the contents of Mark is found in Matthew, fifty-one percent in Luke, most of Mark’s actual words appearing in one or the other. Only thirty-one of Mark’s 661 verses are omitted by both Luke and Matthew.”¹⁴

But this copying process of Matthew and Luke, was accompanied by a distortion of most of the Christ’s titles and some important key words and expressions. This fact is confirmed by a simple comparison of identical passages of the gospels:

Mark says “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister and mother.” — 3 : 35.

But Matthew has changed this into:

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” — 12 : 50.

And, about the asking of the sons of Zebedee, Mark says : “but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” — 10 : 40.

Matthew has changed this into:

“but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” — 20 : 23.

When the Christ asked his disciples what they say who he was, Mark says:

“Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’” — 8 : 29.

¹³ Ref. 6 : p. 11
¹⁴ Ref. 4 : p. 117

But Matthew says:

“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ — 16 : 16

Mark says:

“And there appeared to them Eli’jah with Moses.. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is well that we are here.’ — 9 : 4-5.

But Matthew says:

“And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli’jah.. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is well that we are here.’ — 17 : 4.

Mark says:

“And he said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God has come with power.’ — 9 : 1.

But Matthew says:

“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’ — 17 : 28.

And Mark’s account:

“and many who heard him were astonished saying.. Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?” — 6 : 2-3.

But Matthew’s version:

“they were astonished, and said.. Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? Are not all his sisters with us?” — 13 : 54-56.

It is noteworthy that this text distortion was not limited to the insertion of some points of one gospel (Mark) into that of another (Matthew and Luke), but there were also errors of conscious modification in copying the same gospel. For example, Mark’s traditional gospel begins:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”

but according to R.S.V., other ancient authorities omit 'the Son of God.' The ancient MS. is "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

John Fenton comments on this feature of the gospels:

"The manuscripts have been modified considerably in places where the titles of the Lord were mentioned, and it is therefore not always possible to be certain what the original reading was. But the full title, 'Jesus Christ' would be appropriate here (as it was in the title of the book and the beginning of the birth-story, 1 : 1, 18)"¹⁶

What is mentioned here only gives a very limited number of examples of the distortions and changes made intentionally to the titles of Jesus Christ. This sort of distortions, which lead to serious conclusions, was the basis for the differences in Christian belief and was the cause of those terrible and sometimes bloody conflicts among the different Christian sects across the centuries.

6 Unfulfilled Prophecies

(1) Judas the Traitor will Accompany the Christ in the World to Come :

In an argument between the Christ and his disciples, Peter said:

"we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have? Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." — Mt 19 : 27-29.

Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve to whom this prophecy was said. After his betrayal of Christ, he was called 'son of loss,' and was expelled, forever, from the company of the Christ. It would thus become impossible for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

If we go back to the identical passage in Luke's gospel, we find that:

"Luke's version (R.S.V.) omits the number 'twelve' here, possibly because Luke was thinking of Judas Iscariot."²¹

¹⁶ Ref. 7 : p. 271

²¹ Ref. 7 : p. 317

Luke's identical passage says:

"I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." — 22 : 29-30.

(ii) The Christ will be buried 'three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' :

Some of the Christ's opponents tried to challenge him asking for a sign.

"But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in heart of the earth.'" — Mt 12 : 39-40.

This wording is common in the gospels and is frequently repeated at more than one place in the same gospel. It is mentioned again in Mt 16 : 21; 20 : 19. Also in Mk 8 : 31; 9 : 31; 10 : 34.

It is also mentioned in Luke, with an important change, easily noticed by the reader:

"This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nin'evah, so will the Son of man be to this generation." — 12 : 29-30.

Similarly the 'three days are mentioned' in John 2 : 19. In Jonah 1 : 17; 2 : 1-10, we read:

"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights..

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.. And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

In order that this prophecy be shown to have been fulfilled in the events following crucifixion described in the gospels, we find that, according to the synoptics : (a) The crucifixion was on Friday, (b) on that evening, the crucified was taken down and laid in a tomb, (c) and at dawn on Sunday 'the first day of the week.. while it was dark' the followers discovered that the tomb was empty. So the number of days spent in the heart of

the earth = 1 day (Saturday).

the number of nights spent in the heart of the earth = 2 nights (Saturday night, and a part of Sunday night).

Accordingly this prophecy also could never be fulfilled.

**(iii) The Universe is to collapse in the first century A.D.!
Sensational indeed is this sub-title!**

But this is what the gospels say. We have already seen that the imminent end of the world, followed by the second coming of the Christ had influenced the entire thinking of all those who contributed in writing the New Testament. This thought had exercised and still is exercising its deep influence on the Christian belief.

The gospels say that the Christ [“]called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity.. These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.’” — Mt 10 : 1-23.

Thus the second coming of the Christ is to take place before the twelve disciples’ going through all the towns of Israel.

It was to happen before some of those who had listened to the preaching of the Christ would have died:

“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” — Mt 16 : 28

Besides, the second coming of the Christ, preceded by the collapse of the universe, is to take place before ‘this generation’ would have passed away.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the

other.. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.” — Mt 24 : 29-34.

Mark 13 : 24-30, and Luke 21 : 25-32, are in full agreement with what is recorded by Matthew.

Paul in his letters, the earliest Christian canonical writings accepted by the Church, was quite convinced that the second coming of the Christ was at hand, and he, Paul, will not die before being caught up in the clouds to meet his Lord in the air:

“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.” — I Thess 4 : 15-17.

Today more than 19 centuries have elapsed after the date that had been fixed by the gospels and other New Testament writings for the collapse of the universe and the second coming of the Christ. But the universe is still existing, and the Christ has not yet come... Even, if the Christ comes now—to correct and reform what the authors of the New Testament had written, concerning dogma, law, and the true gospel—this will not change the fact that such false prophecies had been attributed to him. They are nothing but products of imagination and randomly collected material.



Errors in Testimonies of the Old Testament

The gospels say that after John the Baptist had baptized the Christ, he was exposed to temptation by Satan.

“And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” — Lk 4 : 13.

The Christ has become ready for his message. In the commencement “he went to the synagogue..

And stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where

it was written, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.. And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" — Lk 4 : 16-21.

Thus the Christ declared that his message had its support in the Old Testament. That is why the Jews should believe in the Messenger, and in his Message.

Frequent references to signs, oracles, and prophecies of the Old Testament was the main weapon used by the Christ and his disciples in their controversies with the Jews.

In one of these challenging positions, the Christ said:

"With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says:

'You shall indeed hear but never understand,
and you shall indeed see but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are heavy of hearing,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should perceive with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
and turn for me to heal them.'" — Mt 13 : 14-15.

He also said:

"You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.-John 5:39.

When Peter had spoken of Judas, the traitor, he said:

"Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled. For it is written in the book of Psalms,
'Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one live in it'" — Acts 1 : 16-20

Wrong Understanding of the Old Testament:

"Ten times in his Gospel, Matthew uses a formula to introduce a quotation from the Old Testament : the formula is 'this took place

to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet'... (see 1²², 2^{15,17,23}, 4¹⁴, 8¹⁷, 12¹⁷, 13³⁵, 21⁴, 27⁹). These quotations introduced by a formula are additions which Matthew has made to his source, Mark, and are one of the characteristic features of this Gospel. But there are also many other places in the book where we can be almost certain that Matthew has an Old Testament passage in mind, although he does not explicitly refer to it : see, for example, 27³⁴, 'they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall;' with which compare Psalm 69²¹, 'They gave me poison [Greek, gall] for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink;' and contrast the Marcan parallel, 'they offered him wine mingled with myrrh' (Mark 15²³).

Modern study of the Old Testament does not support Matthew's understanding of it, nor the use he made of it when he was writing his Gospel. It is now seen that the Old Testament was not a collection of detailed foretellings of future events, which could only be understood centuries later : the Old Testament writers were in fact writing for their contemporaries in a way which could be understood by them, and describing things that would happen more or less in their own lifetime..

David was believed to be the author of the Psalms, and many passages in the Psalms were taken by Christians as reference to Christ (cf. Acts 2^{29ff.} where Pss. 16, 132, and 10 are quoted)..

It is now known that many of the Psalms were not written by David, but belong to a later date; and the passages in them which Christian read as prophecies of the Messiah originally had a different meaning."¹

Charles Dodd remarks:

"If we scrutinize the scriptures which formed the main sources of 'testimonia,' a remarkably small proportion of them are found to be explicitly 'messianic' ('the Lord's Anointed'), or that they can be shown to have received a messianic interpretation in pre-Christian Judaism. The outstanding titles which are transformed from prophecy to the 'kerygma' concerning Jesus are 'Son of Man' and 'Servant.' It is noteworthy that neither of these titles came to be of first-rate importance in the developed theology of the Church."²

¹ Ref. 7 : pp. 8-17 359

² Ref. 9 : p 116

In the dawn of Christianity, when Christ lived among his disciples and followers, preaching his gospel, and in the succeeding years after his departure, before the appearance of Paul among the disciples, they all believed that the Christ was : Son of man, Servant of God, and nothing more.

But shortly after that, Paul spoke of him as a divine being : "God who is over all be blessed" — Rom 9 : 5.

This sort of speech and thought led Christianity to division and it became a permanent source for splitting.

The Old Testament Testimonies :

From a study by Rendel Harris, entitled 'Testimonies' (1916, 1920), we find that the Old Testament testimonies mentioned in the New Testament, explicitly or implicitly, can be classified as under:

- (a) certain passages tend to be quoted by more than one writer;
- (b) when they are so quoted, the said writers not infrequently agree in a reading different from that of the LXX, as if they were using in common a different translation, though such translation can seldom be identified, except in so far as some of these peculiar renderings reappear in the later versions of Aquila of Theodotian;
- (c) certain passages tend to appear in combination in more than one New Testament book, suggesting that two or more authors took them from a source in which they were already combined; and this suggestion is all the stronger where it appears that a writer has inadvertently attributed two passages from different authors to the same author, as for example Mark (i.2-3) gives a composite citation from Malachi and Isaiah and attributes the whole to Isaiah, an error which might easily arise if he were drawing the quotations not from copies of the books in question, but from an anthology which gave the two prophecies together;
- (d) groups of passages tend to occur, connected by some key words or idea, e.g. various passages which speak of a stone-the stone which the builders rejected, the corner-stone of Zion, the stone of stumbling, and Daniel's stone cut without

hands, which overthrew the great image and ground it to powder."²

As a result of the wrong understanding of what was considered by the New Testament writers as prophecies concerning the Christ, the testimonies in question were not in agreement with what they always tried to assert, that is : Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and he was crucified as 'a ransom for many.'

Here we give seven testimonies, especially of the Gospels of Matthew and John for two reasons:

- (i) Matthew's gospel pays the greatest attention to the Old Testament testimonies,
- (ii) Matthew's gospel is one of the synoptics, that gives almost the same doctrine and narratives as in others, but mostly different from that in John. Therefore, studying Matthew and John, on this subject, would mean studying all the four gospels.

Testimonies of Matthew's Gospel :

1. Micah of the Old Testament says :

"But you, O Bethelchem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel." — 5 : 2.

Also, II Samuel says:

"Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel.'" — 5 : 1-2

The writer of Matthew's gospel mixed these two passages into one passage, for asserting that the birth of the Christ in Bethelchem was a fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy. He says:

"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled.. and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born, They told him, 'In Bethelchem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet : 'And

² Ref. 9 : p. 24

you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.” — Mt2 : 4-6.

John Fenton comments on this Matthian testimony, saying:

“The prophecy is from Mic. 5², but it is not given in the LXX translation, nor is it an exact rendering of the Hebrew text. 2 Sam. 5² may have been combined with the Micha prophecy.”⁵

It is clear that II Sam 5 : 2 speaks of the history of David, and how the people of Israel had chosen him a king.

But that of Micah speaks of a good ruler in Israel. But the Christ had never been a ruler in Israel, even for one day.

“One of the multitude said to him, ‘Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?’” — Lk 12 : 13-14.

And, the Christ : “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.” Jn 6 : 15.

But even a combination of these Old Testament passages could not give a true prophecy of the Christ.

2. Exodus of the Old Testament says:

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles.. And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’” — 4 : 21-23.

The title : Son of God, is frequently used in the Old Testament to mean either the Israelite people—as shown above—or to speak of a good ruler or prophet, like Solomon and others. Hosea says in his revelation, referring to the mercy of God upon the Israelite people in the days of Moses:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” — 11 : 1

But Matthew regarded it possible to combine the events of calling

⁵ Ref. 7 . p. 46

out of the Israelite people from Egypt, and that of the going back of the child Jesus out of Egypt. Thus, he says:

“And he (Joseph) rose and took the child and his mother.. and departed to Egypt.. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son.’ — 2 : 14-15.

John Fenton says:

“The quotation is from Hos. 11⁶; it is a translation of the Hebrew text, and is not taken from the LXX version. It referred originally to God’s calling Israel, his ‘son,’ from Egypt at the time of the Exodus.”⁶

3. Isaiah of the Old Testament speaks of a forthcoming chosen prophet, widely known as : Servant of God, and has a new law, other than that of Moses. He says:

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” — 42 : 1-4.

The Gospels’ writers saw that this prophecy was fulfilled in the Christ. Matthew says:

“This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah : ‘Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry loud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick, till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope.’ — 12 : 17-21.

John Fenton says:

“This is the longest Old Testament quotation in Matthew; and it has been shown that Matthew did not follow anyone text of

⁶ Ref. 7 : p. 48

Isa.42¹⁻⁴ (in Hebrew or in Greek) but drew upon several, according as they fitted into his purpose, which was to show the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jesus and his Church. Matthew has omitted two lines from Isa.42⁴, but retained the last line, because it fitted his purpose; and he uses the Greek translation, because it expressed best what Matthew believed the meaning of Isaiah to have been.”⁷

It is to be noted that the forthcoming prophet is distinguished by the title Servant of God and not Son of God. So if Christianity is determined to relate the Isaiah’s prophecy to Jesus Christ, it should always call him Servant of God. This will, surely, solve the serious dogmatic problems within the Christianity, as well as without the Christian world.

4. Zechariah of the Old Testament spoke of what had happened between him and his people, saying according to A.V. :

“And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter : a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.” — 11 : 12-13.

Matthew tied that incident of Zechariah with what he had mentioned about the price of the treachery, using the words ‘thirty pieces of silver,’ and ‘potter,’ although he attributed his testimony, wrongly to Jeremiah:

“When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.. And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them in to the treasury, since they are blood money.’ So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.. Then it was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.’” — 27 : 3-10.

⁷ Ref. 7 : p. 19:

Scholars are unanimous about the fact that:

“The quotation is from Zech. 11^{12f.}, and not from Jeremiah; possibly the confusion is due to the fact that Jeremiah bought a field and visited a potter, Jer. 32⁶⁻¹³, 18^{2ff...}⁸

It is to be noted that according to R.S.V., the word : potter, is omitted from Zech 11 : 13, as shown:

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Cast it into the treasury,’ the lordly price at which I was paid off by them.”

However, on a simple comparison of the two narratives about Zechariah and the death of Judas, the traitor as mentioned by Matthew, we have:

- (a) The hero of the story of Zech. is a righteous man, prophet Zechariah himself; while that of Matthew is a traitor whose action was an example of the worst treachery of its kind.
- (b) Zechariah received his wages, thirty pieces of silver, accepted by the Lord who ordered him to cast it in the treasury, as a lordly price. But those thirty pieces of silver given to Judas were a humble price, refused even by Judas himself and also by the hypocrite chief priests who refused to cast it in the treasury, because it was a price of ‘an abomination to the Lord.’ — Deut 23 : 18.

It is noteworthy that Mark, who was a principal source of Matthew, and Luke, only spoke of money:

“Then Judas Iscariot.. went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money.” — Mk 14 : 10-11.

“Judas.. went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and engaged to give him money.” — Lk 22 : 4-6

Thus Mathew was the only gospel writer who spoke of the thirty pieces of silver as a price of the treachery, just to amalgamate his story of Judas Iscariot with that of Zechariah. This was the practice

⁸ Ker. 7 p. 432

of Matthew in his writing. He has already read Zechariah 9:9, which says:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.”

Matthew considered this a prophecy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. He says:

“This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass.’ — 21 : 4-5.

“Matthew seems to have taken this (prophecy) literally, and thus introduced two animals into the story.”⁹

5. Not only had Matthew committed mistakes because of confusing passages of the Old Testament with some of his gospel, but he also committed mistakes when he spoke of unknown testimonies. He said:

“And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’ — 2 : 23.

The scriptures said nothing like that, and scholars report that : “The source of this prophecy is not known.”¹⁰

Testimonies of John's Gospel :

1. David says in Psalm 41 :

“Blessed is he who considers the poor! The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is blessed in the land; thou dost not give him up to the will of his enemies.

The Lord sustains him on his sickbed.. As for me, I said, ‘O Lord, be gracious to me.. My enemies say of me in malice: ‘When will he die, and his name perish?’

⁹ Ref. 7 : p. 330

¹⁰ Ref. 7 : p. 331

All who hate me whisper together about me, they imagine the worst for me. They say, 'A deadly thing has fastened upon him; he will not rise again from where he lies.' Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me. But do thou, O Lord, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may requite them.

But this I know that thou art pleased with me, in that my enemy has not triumphed over me.

But thou hast upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in thy presence forever."

Commentators say, in A.V., that this Psalm speaks of God's care of the poor, David complaineth of his enemy's treachery, and he flees to God for succour.

It is clear that this Psalm begins with reporting that God will keep his servant alive, and will 'not give him up to the will of his enemies' who wish him to 'die, and his name to perish.' In the second passage the suffering servant asks for the mercy of God to protect him of the evil thought against him by his enemies, who say : 'A deadly thing has fastened upon him, he will not rise again from where he lies.' He also complains of the treachery of his trusted friend.

The last passage shows that God has helped his servant who reports that : 'thou hast upheld me because of my integrity.'

The writer of John saw that this psalm refers to the critical position of the Christ when one of his disciples betrayed him. He thus says : "I know whom I have chosen; it is that the scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"

— 13 : 18.

But if this Psalm is to be considered a testimony to what was happening to the Christ, it should be considered a prophecy of his deliverance from being killed by his enemies.

2. David says in Psalm 34 :

"I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth..

I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears..

The poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those
 who fear him, and delivers them..
 The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous,
 and his ears toward their cry.
 The face of the Lord is against evildoers,
 to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,
 and delivers them out of all their troubles..
 Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
 but the Lord delivers him out of them all.
 He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.
 Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who hate
 the righteous will be condemned.”

This Psalm, like the previous one, asserts the deliverance of the righteous suffering servant from the plot of his enemy. God will answer him, and send ‘his angel to encamp around him and deliver him,’ and that wicked will be dead, ‘and cut off the remembrance of ~~them~~ from the earth.’

John says that, after the crucifixion:

“the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken.’ — 19 : 31-36.

John saw that unbreaking the legs of the crucified person was a fulfilment of the Old Testament ~~scriptures~~, the Psalms. But is that true? The gospels agree that in the critical hours, Christ cried too much, pleading to God to save him from being killed.

“And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb’edee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death, remain here. and watch with me. And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.’ — Mt 26:37-39.

It is clear that the Christ was praying in order that the approaching danger of being arrested and killed might be averted. If this Psalm, 34, has a reference to what would happen to the Christ, it asserts nothing but his deliverance and saving. The Psalm says : "The poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them."

By this means, the Christ is saved from being killed and his bones are kept from breaking.

But the statement that the Christ was killed, but his bones were kept from breaking is contrary to the contents of the Psalm. People will agree that a sheep is never harmed by skinning after being slain.

This means that when the gospel writer is trying hard for keeping the bones of the crucified person from breaking, rather than for his full safety, his trying is for **nothing**.

It is therefore clear that the wordings of the Old Testament were misunderstood and combined together without any rule, but to serve a predetermined objective of the writer. This led to wrong testimonies, and absurd conclusions.

The result of such testimonies can be compared to the result obtained by a newspaper reader, who reads the news along the horizontal lines across the whole page, and not along the vertical columns of the page, as it is supposed to be read. He will surely get a bizarre mixture of nonsense.

It is to be noted that most of the testimonies were from the Psalms and Isaiah. This calls for the modern Christian scholars to restudy these two books on the basis of the new discoveries — as the Scrolls from the Dead Sea — and other factors which **may** help in getting more accurate translations from the original tongues. The modern translations of the Bible have affected some corrections in the texts, for example the omission of the trinity text I Jn 5 : 7 still extant in A.V., from R.S.V. and the French T.O.B.

But they still have many corrections to effect especially in the texts of the testimonies.



Chapter 3

The Case of Crucifixion

- Gospels' Narratives of the Crucifixion
- The End of Judas
- The Christ and the Attempts to Kill Him
- The Prophecies of the Christ That He Will Be Saved
- The Prophecies of the Psalms That the Christ Will Be Saved
- Disagreement of the Early Christians as Regards the Crucifixion of the Christ.

GOSPELS' NARRATIVES OF THE CRUCIFIXION

In studying these narratives; we should take into consideration some elementary facts concerning the gospels, which were previously dealt with, but are reproduced below for ready reference:

1. Mark's gospel is the oldest of the canonical gospels; it is written not less than 35 years after the departure of Christ, by a person who had neither seen the Christ in his life nor was he one of his disciples. It is said that he was a follower of Peter.
2. Both Matthew and Luke had copies of Mark's gospel before them when they wrote theirs. These two gospels have been written some 50 — 60 years after the departure of Christ. Moreover, Luke was not a disciple of Christ, and he had never seen him.
3. John's gospel was written for a predetermined objective of the writer, expressed in 20 : 31 : "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

It was written very late, around the beginning of the second century A.D.

4. All the evangelists compiled their books by drawing material as much as possible, from the Old Testament. This led to the problem of wrong testimonies and conclusions.

As all the gospels tell stories about the crucifixion, apparently identical, it would be more convenient to divide the subject into a number of divisions and then study each division as recorded in the gospels.

The narratives of the gospels dealing with the crucifixion can be divided into six divisions : preliminary incidents — the last supper—the last night—the trial—the crucifixion—and the burial.

1. Preliminary Incidents

(i) Anointment of Christ With Ointment :

"It was now two days before the passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him; for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people.'

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred dinarii, and given to the poor.' And they reproached her. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying.' — 14 : 1-8.

Nineham comments:

"However that may be, the passage is by no means entirely clear. Probably what St. Mark intended to convey in VV. 1-2 was simply that the authorities, realizing that any attempt to arrest Jesus openly might provoke rioting among the crowds gathered for the feast (V.2), decided to avoid trouble by getting hold of him secretly (V.1). But if that was his meaning, he has expressed it very inaccurately, for if the wording of V.2 is pressed, the meaning appears to be that the authorities not to take action, even of a stealthy kind, during the feast. But in fact, as the sequel will show, they did act during the feast, and commentators therefore ask what made them change their minds..

The story (of anointment) which St. Mark has inserted here appears to have been one of the many which circulated without any indication of the point in the ministry at which it occurred; St. John places it several days earlier than St. Mark (John 12¹), and St. Luke (if Luke 7^{36ff.} is to be regarded as a variant form of this story), at a completely different point in Jesus' career. In the form in which it reached St. Mark it was located at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper.. but in St. John's version the incident appears to take place in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (12¹⁻²).. the woman and the objectors, whose action and reaction give rise to the words of Jesus, are left completely anonymous. (Contrast the names and descriptions in John 12³, Matt. 26⁹, and Luke 7⁷), which serve to throw into relief the comparative originality of St. Mark's version.'"

¹ Ref. No. 6 : pp. 170-1

Matthew is almost identical with Mark as regards the incident of anointment, except that it was 'the disciples.. (who) were indignant' (26 : 8); and not 'some who said to themselves indignantly.'

But the narratives of both Luke and John are different from both of Mark and Matthew.

John is also different from Luke, who says:

"One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.. A certain creditor had two debtors.. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more.' And he said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon. 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.'" — Lk 7 : 36-47.

John says:

"Six days before the passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Laz'arus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served and Laz'arus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold of three hundred denarii and

given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, ‘Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.’ — Jn 12 : 1-8.

It will be seen that the gospels differ among themselves greatly in this short story about the anointment of the Christ’s body with the ointment, which was considered a preliminary action for the crucifixion and death.

Not only did the gospels differ in its date, but also in its other main elements:

- (a) Place : in the house of Simon the leper (Mark and Matthew) — in the house of the Pharisee (Luke) — in the house of Laz’arus and his sisters (John).
- (b) Identity : unknown (Mark and Matthew) — a sinner (Luke) — a friend woman, Mary the sister of Laz’arus (John).
- (c) What she did : anointed the head of the Christ with ointment (Mark and Matthew) — anointed his feet with ointment (Luke and John).
- (d) Sightseers’ reaction : some were indignant (Mark) — the disciples were indignant (Matthew) — the Pharisee asked himself whether the Christ could have known who and what sort of woman she was (Luke) — Judas Iscariot was indignant.

(ii) **The Betrayal of Judas**

“Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.” — Mk 14 : 10-11.

John Fenton remarks:

“Matthew has changed Mark’s : ‘they promised to give him money’ to ‘they paid him thirty pieces of silver;’ but it is unlikely that Matthew had historical information about this point, since the words are a quotation from Zech. 11¹² : ‘They weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver.’”²

² Ref. 7 : p. 413

Luke is in agreement with Mark but he mentioned an important point, to be discussed later, that the treachery of Judas began after Satan had entered into him before the last supper:

“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.”- Lk 22:3-5.

2. The Last Supper

(i) Preparation for the Last Supper :

“And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?’ And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, ‘The Teacher says, Where is my guest room where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?’.. And the disciples set out and went to the city.. and they prepared the passover.” Mk 14 : 12-16.

Nineham comments:

“Most commentators think that it was infact a fairly late addition to the narrative St. Mark is following in this part of his Gospel. Among these reasons are:

- (a) The day on which the story is said to have occurred is described in a way in which no ordinary Jew of the time would have described it..
- (b) Jesus’ followers are described throughout this section as ‘disciples,’ whereas in the surrounding passages they are consistently referred to as ‘the twelve’ (contrast VV. 12, 13, 14, and, 16 with 10, 17, and 20). This at least suggests that this section is a late-comer to its present context.
- (c) Verse 17 knows nothing of the omission of the two disciples in V. 13; the work of preparation referred to in V. 16 would have been enough to keep them fully occupied right upto the minute, and V. 17, if it had known of the contents of this section, would have to refer to the ten.”³

³ Ref. 6 : pp. 375-6

Matthew is different from Mark in the story of the preparation of the passover meal. He makes all the disciples participate in the preparation.

“Matthew has abbreviated Mark, omitting some of his details; notice in particular that in Mark only two disciples are sent, and the change in the message to the man in Jerusalem.”⁴

(ii) **The Timing of the Last Supper**

John Fenton says:

“Matthew (like Mark) thought that the Last Supper was the passover meal. In the fourth Gospel, on the other hand, the passover is to be eaten on the evening after the death of Jesus (John 18²⁸). The majority of scholars at the moment think that the Marcan and Matthean date is right, and that John changed it for theological reasons.”⁵

John believed that the last supper the Christ had with his disciples was not the passover meal. He says :

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world.. rose from supper, laid aside his garments.. Then he poured water into a basin, began to wash the disciples’ feet.” — 13 : 5.

John also says that they arrested Jesus, the day before the passover meal :

“Then they led Jesus from the house of Ca’iaphas.. It was early. They themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.” — 18 : 28.

The incongruity of the gospels in the timing of the last supper resulted in their incongruity in a significant point, which is considered one of the most important elements of the crucifixion case, that is, fixing the day of crucifixion.

If we consider Mark, Matthew and Luke, then the Christ should have eaten the passover meal with his disciples in the evening of Thursday, followed by the arrest in the same evening (Thursday), and the crucifixion took place the following day, Friday.

⁴ Ref. 7 : p. 414

⁵ Ref. 7 : p. 415

But according to John : the arrest was in the eve of Wednesday, and the crucifixion took place the next day, Thursday, when the paschal lambs were slain!

A question to every Christian:

Did the crucifixion take place on Thursday or Friday?

(iii) The Last Supper and Judas the Traitor :

“And when it was evening he came with the twelve. And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.’ They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I?’ He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!’” — Mk 14 :16-21.

John Fenton remarks:

“Matthew’s alterations to Mark are slight; he has omitted ‘one who is eating with me,’ from Mark 14¹⁸, and this is strange, since it is possibly an allusion to Ps. 41⁹ (quoted in John 13¹⁸), and Matthew does not usually miss a point where the fulfilment of the Old Testament is concerned; but some of the commentators on Mark think that these words were not in Mark when Matthew used it and were added later. Matthew has added ‘Lord’ in V. 22 and the whole of V. 25 in which Judas is declared to be the betrayer.”⁶

Luke says:

“And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them. ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves’.. And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” 22 : 14-20.

George Caird comments on this passage, saying :

“The Lucan account of the Last Supper is a scholar’s paradise

⁶ Ref. 7 : pp. 415-6

and a beginner's nightmare; for it raises problems in almost every department of New Testament study and has provided a basis for a welter of conflicting theories. Firstly, there is a textual problem : the vast majority of manuscripts have what is known as the longer text, including VV. 19-20; the Western text (Codex D, some Old Latin manuscripts, and probably the old Syriac version), here followed by R.S.V., omits these verses.. The disputed verses appear to have been drawn partly from I Cor. 11²⁴⁻²⁵, partly from Mark 14²⁴, and could have been inserted in the text at an early date by a scribe who considered Luke's account to be defective."⁷

But John's narrative is different from what the synoptics tell, as shown below:

“When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter ~~beckoned~~ to him and said, ‘Tell us who it is of whom he speaks.’ So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly’.. So, after the receiving of the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night.” — 13 : 21-30.

To identify the traitor, the gospels quoted different answers from the Christ. Mark wrote : “one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.” Matthew was near to that, but he added : “Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Is it I, Master?’ He said to him, ‘You have said so.’” Luke wrote in a similar way as that of Mark. But John was different; he quotes : “It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.”

There is yet another important point for consideration, previously referred to in the speech of Judas' betrayal; that is, Satan entered into Judas before the supper (Lk 22 : 3), for he after that ‘went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.’

⁷ Ref. 8 · pp. 237

John however reports that 'Satan entered into' Judas after the Christ had dipped the morsel and gave it to him (13 : 27).

When did it happen, before or after?

(iv) The Disciples' Falling Away :

"And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, 'Even though all fall away, I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' But he said vehemently, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same.'" Mk 14:27-31

In Nineham's opinion this part:

"shows that what happened was in accordance with Old Testament prophecy. In this **particular** case that would have been specially necessary, for it must have been a great problem to the early Christians (particularly in Rome). why Peter and the other apostles, who were known to them as such fearless witnesses for Christ, should have denied Jesus in the days of his flesh."⁸

Matthew differs from Mark only in saying : "before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." — 26 : 34.

And Luke says : "The cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me." — 22 : 34.

But the very important thing here is the Christ's saying to his disciples : "You will all fall away."

It is known that the 'falling away' is something completely different from the 'denial.' Man may deny something before people, but he knows it definitely, and keeps it to himself. But **falling away** means—especially in this case—turning away from believing in something. The disciples believed in the Christ and in fulfilling all his prophecies. If he predicted something to happen to him in the future and his disciples had any doubts about that prophecy then in this case the disciples would be said to be falling away, and turning away from their belief in their Teacher.

All these are simple obvious facts needing no proof.

⁸ Ref. 6 : p. 387

We have then to examine carefully the narratives of the gospels, and search for an important thing, the falling away of the disciples, which was to happen in that 'very night' according to the Christ's prophecy.

3. The Last Night

(i) The Passion of Christ :

"And they went to a place which was called Gethsem'ane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I pray.' And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch.' And going a little further, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you wilt.' And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep.' Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.'"—Mk 14:32 -42

John Fenton says:

"This is the last paragraph in which Jesus is with his disciples; at the end of the paragraph that follows it, 'all the disciples forsook him and fled' (26³⁶)."⁹

Nineham writes:

"Opinions are sharply divided about the historical value of this section, and even as to whether it formed part of St. Mark's narrative source. Some point out that such a report could well have emanated from Peter, and emphasize the unlikelihood of the Church's having invented a scene which was so damaging to the apostles and which stressed the horror and distress of Jesus

⁹ Ref 7 · p. 421

(VV. 33 and 34) in contrast to the serenity with which many of the early Christian martyres faced death.. Others emphasize that there could not possibly have been any witness for a good deal of what is here described, and that no one could have known what Jesus prayed in private (V. 35). They regard the model prayer (V. 36) and the threefold structure of the incident as artificial (? cf. Peter's threefold denial), and regard the Lucan account as based on more trustworthy, though not necessarily ultimately authentic, tradition. Confident decision (as regards what happened in the garden) is impossible."¹⁰

Matthew's narrative is in agreement with Mark's, except that Mark's : "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me" — has been changed by Matthew to : "My Father, if it possible, let this cup pass from me" — 26 : 39

There is however a cause for this change to have been made by Matthew, which will be mentioned later, when we study : The Christ and the attempts to kill him.

But Luke's narrative deserves to be fully exposed:

"And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.' (And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat : became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.) And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, 'Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'" — 22 : 39-46

George Caird's comment on this passage is:

"According to Mark, Jesus now began to be overwhelmed with bewilderment and horror, and spoke to his disciples of a sorrow by which his very life was being drained away; and unable to bear the company of his dearest friends, he spent the night in successive

¹⁰ Ref. 6 : pp. 389-90

spasms of anguished prayer. Luke's brief account gives us, if possible, an even stronger impression of turbulence : for it is he who tells us that Jesus tore himself away from his companions, that he was in an agony, and that his sweat became like great drops of blood. When we remember the calm courage with which other brave men have faced death in all its **barbarous** and excruciating forms, we cannot but ask what were the ingredients of the cup which Jesus prayed God to remove from him.

The prayer of Jesus shows us that among the elements of his complex woe was an agony of doubt. He has long since foretold his Passion; but now, on the eve of it, he hangs back, not simply with a natural shrinking from physical torture, but with an apprehension lest this be not after all the will of God..

The warning to the disciples about the danger of temptation shows that Jesus felt himself and them to be surrounded by the **same** spiritual powers of darkness with which he had wrestled at the outset of his ministry, and part of his agony was his sense of appalling exposure to their final assault upon his integrity.'''¹¹

Some ancient authorities omit VV.43,44 (written between brackets).

''Its omission is best explained as the work of a scribe who felt that the picture of Jesus overwhelmed with human weakness was incompatible with his own belief in the Divine Son who shared the omnipotence of his Father.'''¹²

John's narrative tells that Christ has spent the time from Judas' going away to the chief priests, to his coming back with the band of soldiers to arrest him, in giving his disciples a long discourse which took more than 4 chapters, and thus represents about 20 % of the gospel of John.

In this long discourse, John attributed to the Christ his saying:

''He who has seen me has seen the Father.. I am in the Father and the Father in me.. The Father who dwells in me does his works.. that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us.. that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one''..

¹¹ Ref. 8 : pp. 242-3

¹² Ref. 8 : p. 243

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the Chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am he.’ —Jn 18 : 1-6.

John knows nothing about the passion of Christ, especially in the garden. He had only given a hint about the trouble and sorrow the Christ had, during supper, when he felt the treachery.

“When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ —13 : 21.

(ii) The Arrest :

“And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying ‘The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard.’ And when he came, he went up to him at once, and said, ‘Master!’ And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.’ And they all forsook him and fled.

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.” — Mk 14 : 43 - 52.

Nineham says:

“It is only fair to add that the historicity of the entire episode has been impugned by B.W. Bacon in a famous and important article in Hibbert Journal (Vol. xix for 1920-1, pp. 476 ff.) ‘What did Judas betray?’ on the grounds that Jesus and his movements were

well known, and the authorities could easily have discovered and apprehended him quietly without the expense of 'resort to the slippery aid of hired traitors'.. (With respect to V. 47) the action seems inappropriate after the arrest has already been accomplished; in any case the verse is only very loosely attached to 43 - 46..

Jesus' words (VV. 48 - 49) seem inappropriate addressed to the crowd (Contrast Luke 22³²), and are generally regarded as belonging to 'an imaginative recast of the scene'..

These Puzzling verses (51-52) fit very awkwardly on to V. 50; some copyists rewrote the Greek in order to get a smoother connexion, and Matthew and Luke both omit these verses."¹³

John Fenton remarks:

"Matthew's main changes to Mark are additions : to Judas' saying : 'Hail Master!' — and to Jesus' saying : 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?'.. Matthew has omitted Mark's story of the young man who ran away naked, Mark 14^{51f.}"¹⁴

Luke's narrative is parallel to Matthew's, but it rejected what was said about the twelve legions of angels.' Luke also rejected the Marcan narrative of the naked young man. He mentioned something different about Judas' kiss, when he said:

"While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas.. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?' — 22 : 47-48

But John's narrative of the arrest is quite different from the other three. He says:

"So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them. 'Whom do you seek?' They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am he.'

¹³ Ref. 6 : pp. 394-6

¹⁴ Ref. 7 : pp. 424-6

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When he said to them, 'I am he,' They drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he; so if you seek me, let these men go.' This was to fulfill the word which he had spoken, 'Of those who gavest me I lost not one.' Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me.' —18 :3-11.'

(iii) Where is the falling away of the Disciples?

The gospels have already attributed to the Christ his saying : "You will all fall away because of me this night." Here we face two probabilities;

- (a) the Christ may have predicted before his disciples that he will face a plot which, although it will cause him much passion, will fail, and God will save him from the death the plotters were aiming at,
- (b) or the Christ may have predicted that he will be the Victim of a successful plot which will end in his death.

In the case of (a), according to the four gospels, the disciples saw that the plot had succeeded; the Christ was arrested and swallowed by the evil power, contrary to what he had foretold. If this was what had truly happened to the Christ then the disciples should fall away. For, he had predicted his safety, but the events did not comply. And as the gospels showed that the disciples had never fallen away that night, this leads us to the conclusion that the events ended with the failure of the plot, and the Christ was saved.

But in the case of (b), the gospels say that the plot succeeded, the Christ had been killed, and his disciples believed it. In this case, there is no occasion for the falling away of the disciples.

As we have already shown that falling away is something different from denial, and as the gospels said nothing about the falling away, we have to admit one of the following : (1) either the Christ was saved, (2) or the gospels attribute to him false predictions.

To a traditional Christian, the first choice is hard, but the second one is harder, because it proves that these scriptures—the sources of the Christian belief—have no relation at all with the revelation from God.

It is seen that the gospels differed in the incidents of the arrest. Mark and Matthew said that Judas had kissed the Christ; Luke said that Judas was about to kiss him, but John knows nothing of that kiss. While Mark and Matthew spoke of salutation and a speech between Judas and the Christ, Luke knows nothing of that salutation, on the other hand John says nothing of Judas except his complete silence.

If we overlook what was said of the naked young man and the twelve legions of angels, there are still three main points to be considered:

1. The kiss was the only means by which the band of soldiers recognised the Christ (Mark, Matthew and Luke), but according to John they recognised him after he had declared his identity openly, in the manner expected of the great men of God. One such man was prophet Eli'jah who challenged the tyrant king Ahab:

“When Ahab saw Eli'jah, Ahab said to him, ‘Is it you, you troubler of Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Ba’als. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba’al and the four hundred prophets of Ashe’rah who eat at Jez’ebel’s.. And Eli'jah said to them, ‘Seize the prophets of Ba’al; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them; and Eli'jah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there.” — I kings 18 : 17-40.

2. An unexpected incident had suddenly occurred, that was why the band of soldiers ‘drew back and fell to the ground.’
3. According to the four gospels, the disciples had never fallen away that night of the arrest. And as the whole story of the Christ is always referred to in the Old Testament books, especially that of the Psalms, then Psalm 91, which is often used as a testimony, says:

“Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge of you, to guard you in all your

ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.. Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him, because he knows my name.. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.”

Therefore one is perfectly right to believe that at the moment the Christ was about to be caught by the evil power, the angels : ‘on their hands’ had borne him, and he ascended to heaven in a manner similar to that of Eli’jah (II Kings 2 : 11). This was the cause why the evil power ‘drew back and fell to the ground.’ It was also the cause of the gospels’ silence with respect to the falling away of the disciples.

4. The Trial

(i) The First Trial : before the Sanhedrin:

“And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priest and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ‘We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’ Yet not even so did their testimony agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, ‘Have you no answer to make?’ What is that these men testify against you?’ But he was silent and made no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ And the chief priest tore his garments, and said, ‘Why do we still need witnesses?’ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?’ And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards received him with blows.” — Mk 14 : 53-65.

Nineham remarks:

‘How this section grew up it is not easy to say.. the question of its historicity has been, and still is, the subject of lively debate. The main reasons for doubting its historicity must be briefly set out and discussed.

1. St. Mark describes the trial as taking place before ‘the council’ i.e. the Sanhedrin, an official body of seventy-one members, under the presidency of the high priest, which was the supreme judicial authority in Israel. The Tract Sanhedrin in the Mishnah sets out fully the procedure adopted in trials before this body, and a comparison of what it says with St. Mark’s account of the trial of Jesus reveals numerous discrepancies, many of them very considerable..
2. But would members of the Sanhedrin have met, even for such informal proceedings, in the middle of Passover night or, for that matter, if St. Mark’s chronology of the passion week is inaccurate, in the middle of a night just before the Passover?.. a formal trial at such a time seems unthinkable and most scholars are very doubtful about the holding of even an informal investigation at such a time. St. Luke says nothing of a night session of the council (Luke 22⁶⁶ : when day came...), and in St. Mark’s account the early morning session reported in 15¹ seems to have no real point; why should the council meet ‘as soon as it was morning’ (15¹) if it had already done all that is reported in 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵ during the night? Many scholars therefore, think that St. Mark, knowing two accounts of the ‘trial’ (that reproduced in 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵ and that reproduced in 15¹), and perhaps having some inkling of some sort of a private inquiry immediately after the arrest, wrongly understood the two accounts as referring to two different trials.

In fact the Jewish authorities met only once, and that was in the early morning as described in 15¹. A further question then arises:

3. How far does 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵ give an account of what took place at this early morning session? Here again expert opinion is very divided, some commentators treating St. Mark’s account with great respect, despite its admitted difficulties, on the grounds that accurate information might well have been forthcoming from councillors who subsequently became Christians, others dismissing this as pure speculation, and arguing, on internal

evidence, that the passage represents little more than early Christian inference as to the sort of thing that must have happened. This internal evidence must be briefly reviewed.

- (a) If false witnesses were suborned (VV.55-59), would they not, as a matter of common prudence, have been schooled in advance, so that their witness did 'agree together?' Also the transition from this part of the narrative of the high priest's question in V. 61 seems impossibly abrupt.
- (b) According to the Jewish Law neither the temple saying, even had it been proved, nor Jesus' reply to the high priest, constituted blasphemy, for which a definite railing against the divine name was essential.
- (c) If Jesus was condemned for blasphemy, why did not the Jewish authorities themselves carry out the sentence and stone him to death in accordance with the Law (Lev. 24, etc.)?"¹⁵

John Fenton observes:

"Matthew has slightly abbreviated Mark 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵, but added the oath of the high priest in V. 63 and part of the words of mockery in V. 68.. Matthew has changed Mark's 'I am' (into : You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven)."¹⁶

Luke is different from both Mark and Matthew in the matter of the number of trials and the timing of the first one. These two have mentioned the first trial to have taken place before the Sanhedrin, at night, just after the arrest. But Luke has stated the first trial to have taken place in the morning.

He says : "Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him'... Now the Men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him.. When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their

¹⁵ Ref. 6 : pp. 398-403

¹⁶ Ref. 7 : pp. 427-8

council, and they said, 'If you are the Christ, tell us.' But he said to them, 'If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.' And they all said, 'Are you the son of God then?' And he said to them, 'You say that I am.' And they said, 'What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.'" — 22 : 54-71.

George Caird writes:

"Luke omits the preliminary investigation described by Mark and comes straight to the crucial question : Are you the Messiah? At first Jesus declines to answer; 'Messiah' is an ambiguous term, and he recognizes that the court is in no mood to discuss definitions. He still prefers the title Son of man.. Finally, however, Jesus replies to the question with a veiled answer, which the interrogators take as assent. It is all they need for the framing of their charge."¹⁷

John's narrative is completely different from the other three. He made the band of soldiers lead the seized man, first to Annas, the father-in-law of Ca'iaphas the high priest. He also gives a different version of questioning by the high priest.

He says:

"So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Ca'iaphas, who was the high priest that year.. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.' When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong, but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' Annas then sent him bound to Ca'iaphas the high priest." — 18 : 12-24.

¹⁷ Rcl 8 pp 245-6

(ii) Peter's Denial :

We have already discussed some points about the narrative of Peter's denial, when we talked about : "Repulsive Narratives : Peter and the Christ." An important point for consideration is the confusion in the various prophecies attributed to the Christ, one dealing with the falling away and stumbling of the disciples at the feet of their Master, and the other dealing with Peter's denial of his Master before men. According to Mark:

"And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the scribes were assembled. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire.. And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came; and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, 'You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.' But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know or understand what you mean.' And he went out into the gateway. And the maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' But again he denied it. And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them : for you are a Galilean.' But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know this man of whom you speak.'

And immediately the cock crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept." — Mk 14 : 53-72.

Nineham comments:

"The story of Peter's denial raises few difficulties.. It is only fair to add, however, that to Bultmann it seems 'Legendary and literary'..

One important MS. which omits the words ('and a cock crowed') also omits 'a second time' and 'twice' in V. 72 and 'twice' in V. 30; in that case all reference to a double crowing is missing and Mark is completely in line with Matthew and Luke."¹⁸

¹⁸ Ref 6 pp 199, 204

Matthew writes:

“But Peter followed him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.. Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a maid came up to him, and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you mean.’ And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders, ‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ And again he denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know the man.’ And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, ‘Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.” — 26 : 58-75.

John Fenion remarks:

“Matthew has added, ‘before them all’ (in V. 70), perhaps because he has the saying of Jesus in 10³³ in his mind here, ‘Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.’”¹⁹

Luke’s account:

“Peter followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later some one else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.’

But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are saying.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’” — 22 : 54-61.

¹⁹ Ref. 7 pp. 429

George Caird opines:

“From this point on Luke’s story runs in parallel to Mark’s but with considerable divergence both in order and in content. According to Mark Jesus was taken straight before a midnight session of the Sanhedrin, the mocking took place in the court after the hearing, Peter’s denial occurred in an outer courtyard during the trial, and at a second session held at daybreak the decision was made to send Jesus to Pilate. According to Luke Jesus was kept under guard in the priest’s house until the Sanhedrin could be called, and it was during the long night of waiting that the guards amused themselves at the expense of the prisoner and Peter denied his master. The Lucan order is by far the more probable.”²⁰

The preference for Luke’s narrative is mainly due to his discarding of the version of the trial before the Sanhedrin at night. John says:

“Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. The maid who kept the door said to Peter, ‘Are not you also one of this man’s disciples?’ He said, ‘I am not’... The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.. Annas then sent him bound to Ca’iaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, ‘Are not you also one of his disciples?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’ Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed.” — 18 : 16-27.

It is quite clear that the gospels differ considerably in their versions of the story of Peter’s denial. There is so much variation in such an important incident as the three denials of Peter, that we need not examine the minor details like the cock crowing, which has its own variations.

Summing up, we have the first denial was on the question by a

²⁰ Ref. B : pp. 244

maid, below in the courtyard (Mark); a maid, outside in the courtyard (Matthew); a maid, in the courtyard (Luke); the maid who kept the door (John).

The second denial was in answer to the same maid, in the gateway (Mark); another maid, out in the porch (Matthew); someone else 'a man' (Luke); the standing (John).

The third denial was a reply to the bystanders (Mark); the bystanders (Matthew); another man (Luke); one of the servants of the high priest.

We may concede that the gospels are generally agreed on the identity of the interrogator who caused Peter to give his first denial. But, with respect to the second and third denials, there is no agreement. If this is the case of an event connected with the crucifixion, whose witnesses were two of the Christ's disciples, Simon Peter, and 'the other disciple who was known to the high priest,' what can be said then of the other important events of this case? And what about the other important matters, such as the resurrection and the appearance? How much credit can be given to such narratives to form the bases of a dogma and a religious belief?

(iii) The Second Trial : before Pilate:

"And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and the scribes, and the whole council held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'You have said so.' And the chief priest accused
 And Pilate again asked him of many things, 'Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.' But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered. Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barab'bas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do so as he wont to do for them. And he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?' For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barab'bas instead. And Pilate again said to them, 'Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the king of Jews?' And they cried out again. 'Crucify him.' And Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done?'

But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him.' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd released for them Barab'bas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.' — Mk 15 : 1-15.

Nineham opines:

"The section opens with a second meeting of the Sanhedrin, for so St. Mark regarded the gathering he describes in V.1; but the tradition embodied in the verse gives no hint of any previous meeting, and it may well be that this was the only meeting held, the tradition enshrined in 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵ representing originally a Christian reconstruction of the sort of thing it was felt must have happened at this meeting. If so, the detailed historical facts are beyond precise reconstruction.. Although the trial before Pilate is represented as taking place out of doors, and will certainly have been much more public than the hearing before the Jewish leaders, St. Mark's account of it is by no means an eyewitness report; indeed it is not a report at all.. This explains why we are not told how Pilate learned the charge (in V. 2 he already knows it) and why there is no mention of a formal verdict or passing of sentence (contrast Luke 23²⁴)..

With regard to historicity, we have seen that the passage has no pretensions to be a complete or coherent report of the trial, and it would not be right to judge it as if it had. Two questions, however, do call for brief discussion. The first concerns the character of Pilate. To judge from the fairly full information we have about him in Jewish sources, he appears to have been an 'inflexible, merciless, and obstinate' man continually given to corruption, violence, and cruelty of every kind. Even when allowance is made for possible exaggeration in the Jewish accounts, the weakness and scrupulous concern for justice attributed to him in our passage hardly seem compatible with the character of such a man, and most commentators think we should allow for some idealization in St. Mark's account, arising out of the Christian desire to excuplate the Romans and put responsibility on the Jews.

The second question concerns the custom of releasing a prisoner referred to in V. 6.. 'nothing is known of any such custom as is here described. That at the feast of the Passover the Roman procurators regularly released one prisoner, and that the crowds named the individual no matter his offence had been, is not only without any attestation whatsoever, but also contrary to what we know of the spirit and manner of Roman ruler over Palestine.' It is, therefore,

widely held that the reference to a regular custom in V.6 is an erroneous inference by the Evangelist (or his predecessors) from the particular episode in 7 ff. but the content of the dialogue (between Pilate and the mob) presents problems; it seems to presuppose that Pilate is faced with a choice between two condemned prisoners, so that if one is released, the other must be executed; but at the end of VV.2-5 Jesus has not been condemned, and, as the story stands, there is nothing to prevent Pilate, if he believed in Jesus' innocence, from acquitting him and granting an amnesty to Barabbas as well.

In St. Matthew's version of the story, the name of the insurrectionary is twice (27¹⁶ and 17) given in many MSS. as Jesus Barab-bas, and this is widely held to be the original reading.. The omission of the word in our MSS. is easily explained, for although in the time of our Lord, Jesus (= Joshua) was quite a common name (cf. Col. 4¹¹) Christians soon came to regard it as too holy for common use, and its application to a criminal would have been particularly offensive."²¹

Matthew has added to Mark's narrative two stories, one about the end of Judas, which will be studied further in detail and the other about the dream of Pilate's wife.

Matthew also has shown that Pilate had declared his innocence of the blood of the one to be crucified, in a strictly formal way:

"And he (Pilate) said, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified.'

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see it yourselves.' And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' Then he released for them Barab'bas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified." — 27 : 23-26.

John Fenton writes:

"The action of washing hands as a sign of innocence is Jewish rather than Roman; see Deut. 21¹⁶ and note 'all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands... and they shall testify, 'Our hands did not shed this blood.' It is very unlikely that Pilate would have done this."²²

²¹ Ref. 6 . pp. 410-16

²² Ref 7 : p. 436

Luke mentioned that this second trial was composed of two trials:

One before Pilate when “the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.’ And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ And he answered him, ‘You have said so.’ And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, ‘I find no crime in this man.. he sent him over to Herod.. And Herod.. sent him back to Pilate.. Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chastise him and release him.’” — 23 : 1-16.

It should be mentioned that V. 17: ‘Now he was obliged to release one man to them at the festival,’ “is no part of the original text of Luke, but its excision leaves the Barabbas episode very clumsily connected to the main narrative.”²³

(iv) The Third Trial : before Herod :

“But they were urgent, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.’ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became

²³ Ref 8 : p. 248

friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.” — Lk 23 : 5-12.

George Caird says:

“The trial before Herod is not mentioned in any of the other Gospels, and some scholars have wondered whether, between daybreak and 9 A.M. (Mark 15²³), there could have been time for so much coming and going. On the other hand Luke probably had contacts with the household of Herod from which he drew his information (8³). Moreover, one of the traditions on which he depended for the early chapters of Acts preserved a prayer in which the complicity of Herod and Pilate in the death of Jesus was treated as a fulfilment of Psalm 2²: ‘the kings of the earth set themselves in array... against the Lord and against his Anointed-(Acts 4²⁶). In the same passage Jesus is called ‘thy holy servant’..

According to Luke, it was Herod’s soldiers, not Pilate’s, who dressed Jesus in royal robes.. Nothing is known of any quarrel between Herod and Pilate.”²⁴

(V) The Mockery of the Soldiers :

“And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praeetorium); and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. And they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.” — Mk 15 : 16-20

Nineham states:

“Many scholars believe that this story is one of St. Mark’s insertion into the primitive narrative.. Two points, however, have been raised. The first is that the story contains echoes—distant but distinct—of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah.. The second point is more teasing. Scholars such as Frazer and Reinach have pointed out that as the story stands, there are interesting parallels to it in the ritual followed at certain ancient festivals, notably the Roman ‘Saturnalia’ and a Babylonian festival known as the

²⁴ *Rei* 8 p 247

'Sacaeta,' and also in an incident recorded by Philo, when the populace of Alexandria staged a mime in a mockery of Agrippa I, who was visiting their city on his way back from Rome, where he had just been made king of Judea by Caligula. Getting hold of a half-witted Jew, they crowned him with a paper crown, clothed him with a mat for a robe, put a papyrus reed in his hand (cf. Matt. 27²⁹; this trait may just possibly have dropped out of Mark's text), provided him with a bodyguard, and then did homage to him and pretended to consult him on matters of state. It is certainly interesting that the victim's name was Carabas, and some scholars, seeing here a connexion with Barabbas, and drawing on various parallels in world religions, have found in the story evidence of a widespread ancient ritual in which one man (known, in the rite, as Carabas or Barabbas) was treated as a mock king while another was ritually slaughtered. In the ancient world convicts were frequently forced to play the leading parts in such rituals, so the way is open for an interpretation of Jesus' Passion, and Jesus—Barabbas' release, as having taken place within the context of some such rite."²⁵

It is noteworthy that:

"The name Barabbas means Son of Abba, i.e. Son of the Father."²⁶

John Fenton says:

"Matthew has made several small alterations in Mark 15¹⁶⁻²⁰: he has changed Mark's 'purple cloak' into 'a scarlet robe,' added the 'reed in his right hand,' and changed the order so that the reference to kneeling comes earlier in the passage."²⁷

(5) The Crucifixion

(i) The Carrier of the Cross :

"And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross."
— Mk 15 : 21-22.

²⁵ Ref. 6 : pp. 418-9

²⁶ Ref. 7 : p. 435

²⁷ Ref. 7 : p. 437

Both Matthew and Luke agree with Mark that the carrier of the cross was Simon of Cyre'ne.

But John knows nothing of this Simon of Cyre'ne. That is why he made the crucified himself carry his cross :

“Then he (Pilate) handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of skull, which is called in Hebrew Gol'gotha. There they crucified him.” — 19 : 16-18.

Nineham comments:

“Those condemned to be crucified were normally made to carry their own crosses.. John 19¹⁷ states that the usual procedure was followed in Jesus' case, but according to Mark an otherwise unknown figure, Simon the Cyrene, was 'impressed' (the precise meaning of the Greek word) by the Romans to carry it for Jesus.. The tradition which locates the place (Golgotha) within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre cannot be traced back beyond the fourth century and is open to considerable question; other sites have been suggested in modern times, but certainty is unattainable. We cannot be sure that the 'skul-place' was a hill and there is nothing to show how it got its name.”²⁸

(ii) The Drink of the Crucified :

“And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it.” — Mk 15 : 23.

Luke says:

“The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar.” — 23 : 36.

And Matthew writes:

“they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall : but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.” — 27 : 34.

John Fenton remarks:

“Mark had, 'but he did not take it;' Matthew changes this, to : 'but when he tasted it, he would not drink it;' the purpose

²⁸ Ref. 6 : p. 422

of the drink was to dull the pain, and this may be why the Evangelists record that Jesus did not drink it."²⁹

(iii) The Charge Against the Crucified :

"And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' — Mk 15 : 26.

Matthew says:

"And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.'" — 27 : 37.

Luke's record:

"There was also an inscription over him (in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew), 'This is the King of the Jews.'" — 24 : 38.

And John's account:

"Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'" — 19 : 19.

Nineham's comment on this part is:

"As to its authenticity (the inscription of the charge), opinions are very divided, some scholars thinking the precise formula was known through eyewitnesses.. others holding that the Romans are unlikely to have used such a bald form of words and that St. Mark's particular formulation of the charge is due once again to his desire to show that it was 'as Messiah' that Jesus was executed."³⁰

The disagreement of the gospels in the written charge against the crucified which is no more than a short line of few words, written on the board of the cross shows clearly the degree of authenticity and trust that the gospels' narratives can command. Accordingly we can very well judge the accuracy of the gospels' writing when they speak of the titles of the Christ; some say : 'You are the Christ,' others say : 'You are the Christ, the Son of God.'

Some others say : 'Certainly this was a righteous man,' still others : 'Truly this man was the Son of God.' Truly, the gospels' disagreement among themselves throws dark shadows on the truth.

²⁹ Ref. 7 : p. 440
³⁰ Ref. 6 : p. 424

(iv) The Two Robbers and the Crucified :

“And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.. Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.” — Mk 15 : 27-32.

Matthew also agrees with Mark that the two robbers reviled him. But Luke says:

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, Jesus, ‘remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” — 23 : 39-43.

The gospels disagree in this view of the behaviour of the two robbers. Mark and Matthew said that they, both, had reviled him, but Luke said that one of them had railed at him, while the other was in sympathy with him, even believed in him, and therefore he rebuked the other robber.

(v) The Hour of Crucifixion :

“And it was the third hour, when they crucified him.”-Mk 15:25.

But John says:

“Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your king!’ They cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’.. Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.” — 19 : 14-16.

Nineham remarks:

“From the point in St. Mark’s narrative where Jesus is finally disowned by men, the time is carefully marked off in three-hour intervals (14 [68 &]⁷², 15^{1,25,33,34,42}). In this instance at least, the reckoning seems artificial, for it is hardly possible that everything recounted in VV. 1-42 could have taken place in the course of a single three-hour period, and John 19¹⁴ clearly implies that it did not.”³²

³² Ref. 6 · p. 424

(vi) The Prayer of the Crucified :

“And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ — Lk 23 :34.

This prayer, only mentioned in Luke, is omitted from the other gospels, also from some Lucan’s MSS.³³

George Caird says:

“The prayer of Jesus is omitted by Codex Vaticanus, Codex Beza, and other important manuscripts.. In the light of Acts 3^{17,19}. 7³⁹. It is probable that the sentence stood in the original text of Luke and that Luke himself took it to refer to the Jews. It has been suggested that the prayer may have been excised from an early copy of the Gospel by a second-century scribe who thought it incredible that God should pardon the Jews and, in view of the double destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and 135, certain that he had not infact done so.”³⁴

(vii) The Cry of Despair on the Cross :

“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land (earth) until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘E’lo-i, E’lo-i, la’ma sabach-tha’ni?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ — Mk 15 : 33-34.

Matthew is in agreement with Mark except his saying :

“Eli, Eli, la’ma sabach - tha’ni?”

But Luke writes:

“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land (earth) until the ninth hour.. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.’ — 23 : 44-46.

And John records:

“After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his

³³ Ref. II : p. 250

³⁴ Ref. II : p. 251

mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished.' — 19 : 28-30.

The cry of despair on the cross stirs up many problems.

Some scholars believe: "That St. Luke and St. John appear to have found the words mysterious and liable to misinterpretation; both have omitted them and substituted, the one : 'Father into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Luke, 23⁴⁶), the other : 'It is finished' (John 19³⁰).. On the other hand 'such a view assumes a narrator who, interested primarily in historical fact, reports faithfully for posterity a terrible and inexplicable utterance. But all our inquiry has tended to show that there was narrator of this sort'.. Many modern scholars adopt a quite different interpretation which rests on the fact that the words are a quotation from Ps. 22¹. Taken as a whole, this Psalm is anything but a cry of despair; it is the prayer of a righteous sufferer who yet trusts fully in the love and protection of God and is confident of being vindicated by him (cf. especially VV. 19-26, particularly VV. 24 and 26)".³⁵

We will study Psalm 22, in detail later.

(viii) The Death of the Crucified :

"And some of the bystanders hearing it (the cry) said, 'Behold, he is calling Eli'jah.' And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Eli'jah will come to take him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last." — Mk 15 : 35-37.

Matthew says:

"And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'This man is calling Eli'jah.' And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Eli'jah will come to save him.' And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit." — 28 : 47-50

John Fenton comments:

"The distinction between the one who gave Jesus the vinegar and the other who said, 'Wait'... is due to Matthew : in Mark, the same

³⁵ Ref 6 : pp. 427-8

man gives him vinegar and says these words. In Matthew, 'the others' address the man who has given him the vinegar. 'aphes (wait)' is in the singular; whereas in Mark it is plural (aphete), and is addressed to the bystanders."³⁶

"Also, other ancient authorities insert (in Matthew's version) : 'And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood.'"³⁷

Luke says:

"And having said this (Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit), he breathed his last." — 23 : 46.

And John's account:

"When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished;' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.. when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.'" — 19 : 30-34.

Whatever be the truth about those last moments, death is a destiny of all creatures. They have to give up their spirits willingly or unwillingly. Only One who has the Ultimate Power over all, and over death which subdues all creatures, Only He never dies.' He is the One who says:

"See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand..
I live forever." — Deut 32 : 39-40.

Truly and surely, God never dies...

(ix) After the Crucifixion :

"And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'" — Mk 15 : 38-39.

³⁶ Ref. 7 : p. 443

³⁷ Ref. 7 : p. 441

Matthew says:

“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’ — 27 : 51-54.

Luke writes:

“The curtain of the temple was torn in two.. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, certainly this man was innocent!.” — 24 : 45-47.

But John knows nothing of all this.

George Caird remarks:

“An eclipse of the sun (according to Luke) while the moon is full is an astronomical impossibility.. It was a widespread belief in antiquity that events of great and tragic moment were accompanied by portents, nature showing its sympathy with the distress of man.”³⁸

And Nincham remarks:

“Similar portents are said to have marked the deaths of some of the great rabbis and also the deaths of some great figures of pagan antiquity, most notably Julius Caesar.”³⁹

And John Fenton comments:

“Matthew adds (to Mark’s account) further signs : an earthquake, the opening of the tombs, the resurrection of the saints and their appearing to many in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus.

These legendary events are included by Matthew to show that the death of Jesus was an act of God.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ref. 8 : pp. 253

³⁹ Ref. 6 : 427

⁴⁰ Ref. 7 : 444.

The Witnesses of The Crucifixion:

“There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Mag’dalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of **Joses**, and Salo’me, who, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him; and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.” — Mk 15 : 40-41.

Matthew also agrees with this account.

Luke says:

“And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things.” — 23 : 49.

And John states:

“But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag’dalene.. and the disciple whom he loved.” — 19 : 25-26.

John Fenton writes:

“The disciples had fled when Jesus was arrested, and though Peter had followed as far as the high priest’s courtyard, we do not hear any more of him after his denials of Jesus. Mark, Matthew and Luke tell us that the witnesses of the crucifixion were women who had come with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. They see his burial, they find the tomb empty on the Sunday morning, and they meet Jesus, 27⁶¹, 28^{1,9}.. and although Matthew says in 13³⁵ that two of Jesus’ brothers were called ‘James and Joseph,’ he can hardly mean by his second ‘Mary,’ Mary the mother of Jesus.”⁴¹

Barett comments on what John says of Jesus’ mother being at the cross:

“It is intrinsically improbable that friends and relations of Jesus would be allowed to stand near the cross.”⁴²

With respect to the ~~witnesses~~ of the crucifixion, the Encyclopaedia Britannica has to state as under:

“In the synoptics, of His followers only women-the careful

⁴¹ Ref. 7 : pp. 443-4

⁴² Ref. 6 : p. 431

seeming exhaustive lists do not include His mother-remain looking on 'from afar' (Mark XV, 40), in John, His mother stands with the two other Marys and the beloved disciple beneath the cross, and 'from that hour the disciple took her unto his own (house),' while in the older literature His mother does not appear in Jerusalem till just before Pentecost, and with 'His brethren' (Acts i, 14)"⁴³

After this testimony we can safely conclude that the major event which forms the basis of the Christian belief, i.e., the crucifixion, was witnessed only by women 'looking from afar'...

(6) The Burial

"And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid." — Mk 15 : 42-47.

Nineham comments:

"The story of Jesus' burial was important in the early Church on two counts : first as establishing that he had really been dead, and so had really risen from the dead; and secondly, from the point of view of the tradition about the empty tomb, it was important as establishing that the women who later found the tomb empty had not gone to the wrong tomb, but to the one in which they had themselves seen the body placed. Loisy writes : 'All the details of the story (of the entombment)... are conceived in view of the discovery of the empty tomb. Mark would impress upon our notice that the same people who saw the entombment saw also the empty tomb'

⁴³ Ref. 17, Vol. 13 : p.99

This obvious connexion with the later story of the empty tomb has made some scholars suspicious of the present account..

It is generally agreed that this verse (47 : Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid) was not originally part of the story."⁴⁴

John Fenton remarks:

"Matthew has abbreviated Mark 15⁴²⁻⁴⁷, but also added a few details of his own.. (He) has changed Mark's 'a respected member of the council' to 'a rich man,' presumably because he wanted to allude to Isaiah's account of the burial of the servant of the Lord..

Matthew has omitted Mark 15⁴⁴, Pilate's inquiry of the centurion into the death of Jesus."⁴⁵

Matthew shows that the tomb used, was the one that was known as Joseph's tomb. He says:

"And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed." — Mt 27 : 59-60.

Luke's account:

"Then he took it down.. and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid." 23 : 53.

But John makes Nicodemus to participate in the burial, with Joseph. He says:

"After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.. took away his body Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and also about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of preparation, as the tomb was close at hand. they laid Jesus there." — 19 : 38-42.

⁴⁴ Ref. 6 pp. 432-3

⁴⁵ Ref. 7 pp. 446-7

John is in agreement with Luke "that Joseph's tomb had never been used before."⁴⁶

The dependence of one writer of the gospel on the story given by another should have created an exactness of details among the gospels' narratives. But the experience of the students of the gospels is quite the contrary. There is no integration in the gospels' doctrines and narratives. To summarise the various disagreements in the details of the most vital story of crucifixion:

The Gospels have disagreed on the accounts of: the arrest, the trials, the timing (day and hour), the cry on the cross, the witnesses, and the burial.

With respect to the truth in the gospels, one cannot, in the circumstances say more than: God only knows!



⁴⁶ Ref. 8 p. 20

THE END OF JUDAS

HOW DID JUDAS PERISH ?

Matthew's gospel is the only one that speaks of Judas' end. He says:

"When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? see to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.' So they took counsel, and bought with them the potters's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.'"—27 : 3-10.

John Fenton writes:

"Matthew uses the interval between the decision of the **Sanhedrin** and the trial before Pilate to tell his readers about the end of Judas. At this point, Matthew is not following Mark; there was no further mention of Judas in Mark, after the arrest of Jesus.. Judas, he says, changed his mind when he saw that Jesus had been condemned, took the money back to the Sanhedrin, and confessed his sin to them.. He puts the money in the temple-treasury, and goes out to hang himself.

The chief priests say that since this is money which has bought a life, it may not be put into the temple-treasury; so they use it to buy a plot of land for cemetery. This fulfils a prophecy, which Matthew ascribes (wrongly) to Jeremiah, but was in fact from the book of Zechariah which has already played an important part in Matthew's narrative.

The death of Judas is recorded by Luke in Acts 1st, which partly agrees with Matthew's account, and partly differs from it."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ref 7 p. 431

Luke's narrative in Acts is as under:

“In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, ‘Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong (or : swelling up) he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akel’dama, that is, Field of Blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, “Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it; and ‘His office let another take.”—Acts 1 : 15-20.

John Fenton opines:

“Judas himself buys the field in Luke, and dies there; and that is why it is called ‘Field of Blood.’ Either Matthew and Luke had independent access to similar stories about Judas, or Luke has abbreviated Matthew’s account and made alterations to it.”⁴⁹

What Matthew in his gospel, and Luke in his Acts, have agreed upon, and about what Mark and John were silent, was that : Judas had perished in suspected circumstances. But Matthew and Luke disagree on:

- (i) How he perished: Matthew said that he had hanged himself. But Luke said that he had a bloody death, where ‘he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.’ Committing suicide by hanging is not that sort of bloody death mentioned in Acts.
- (ii) Who bought the field: Matthew said that it was the chief priests, while Luke said that it was Judas himself.
- (iii) Why the field was called ‘Field of Blood’: Matthew attributed the cause to the price paid for the field, it, was ‘blood money.’ But Luke attributed it to the bloody death of Judas.

Whatever be the truth, the fact remains that Judas had disappeared completely in the great tumult that accompanied the whole incident of crucifixion.

⁴⁹ Ref. 7 . p. 431

To evaluate the two narratives of Judas' perishing, it is better to evaluate first the narratives by Christian sources of Pilate's death.

How did Pilate perish ?

"The Report of Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judas; which was sent to Tiberius Caesar in Rome.

In one of the eastern cities called Jerusalem, where in the temple of the nation of the Jews is erected, all the multitude of the Jews, being assembled, delivered up to me a certain man called Jesus, bringing many and endless accusations against him; but they could not convict him in any thing. But they had one heresy against him, that he said the sabbath was not their proper rest.

Now that man wrought many curses and good works: he caused the blind to see, he cleansed lepers, he raised the dead, he healed paralytics.. And he did another yet more mighty work, which had been strange even among our gods, he raised from the dead one Lazarus, who had been dead four days..

Him then Herod and Archelaus and Philip, and Annas and Caiaphas, with all the people, delivered up to me, to put him on his trial. And because many raised a tumult against me, I commanded that he should be crucified.

Now when he was crucified darkness came over all the world; the sun was altogether hidden, and the sky appeared dark while it was yet day, so that the stars were seen, though still they had their luster obscured.. And the moon, which was like blood, did not shine all night long, though it was at the full..

And on the first day of the week, about the third hour of the night, the sun appeared as it never shone before, and the whole heaven became bright. And as lightnings come in a storm, so certain men of lofty stature, in beautiful array, and of indescribable glory, appeared in the air, and a countless host of angels, crying out and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.. And at their voice all the mountains and hills were moved and the rocks were rent, and the great chasms were made in the earth, so that the very places of the abyss were visible.

And amid the terror dead men were seen rising again, so that the Jews who saw it said, we beheld Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs, who died some two thousand five hundred years before, and we behold Noah clearly in the body..

But many of the Jews died, and were sunk and swallowed up in the chasms that night, so that not even their bodies were to be seen.”⁵⁰

A passage under the title : **The Trial and Condemnation of Pilate**, reads:

“Now when the letters came to the city of the Romans, and were read to Caesar with no few standing there, they were all terrified, because, through the transgression of Pilate, the darkness and the earthquake had happened to all the world. And Caesar, being filled with anger, sent soldiers and commanded that Pilate should be brought as a prisoner. And when he was brought to the city of the Romans, and Caesar heard that he was come, he sat in the temple of the gods, above all the senate, and with all the army, and with all the multitude of his power, and commanded that Pilate should stand in the entrance. And Caesar said to him, Most impious one, when thou sawest so great signs done by that man, why didst thou dare to do thus? By daring to do an evil deed thou hast ruined all the world.

And Pilate said King and Autocrat, I am not guilty of these things, but it is the multitude of the Jews who are precipitate and guilty..

And again Caesar resolve to have Pilate questioned, and commanded a captain, Albius by name, to cut off Pilate’s head, saying, as he laid hands upon the just man, that is called Christ, he also shall fall in like manner, and find no deliverence.

And when Pilate came to the place he prayed in silence, saying, O Lord, destroy not me with the wicked Hebrews, for I should not have laid hands upon thee, but for the nation of lawless Jews.. Destroy me not, therefore, for this my sin, nor be mindful of the evil that is in me, O Lord, and in thy servant Procla who standeth with me in this the hour of my death..

And behold, when Pilate had finished his prayer, there came a voice from heaven, saying, All generations and the families of the Gentiles shall call thee blessed, because under thee were fulfilled all these things that were spoken by the prophets concerning me.. And the Perfect cut off the head of Pilate, and behold an angel of the Lord received it. And when his wife Procla saw the angel coming

⁵⁰ Ref. 2 pp. 275.

and receiving his head, she also, being filled with joy, forth with gave up the ghost, and was buried with her husband."⁵¹

The above story makes of Pilate almost a martyr; and Tertullian makes him almost a saint.

Strange, indeed are these fabricated stories...

Arrest, trials, prayers from the prisoner, voices heard from heaven, finally angels coming down to receive Pilate's head as in the case of a martyr...

Is that all what the barrel of such fabricators contains?...

Let us wait a little, before answering this question, till we read the following story:

A passage under the title **The Death of Pilate, who condemned Jesus**, reads:

"Now whereas Tiberius Caesar emperor of the Romans was suffering from a grievous sickness, and hearing that there was at Jerusalem a certain physician, Jesus by name, who healed all diseases by his word alone; not knowing that the Jews and Pilate had put him to death, he thus bade one of his attendants, Volusianus by name, saying, Go as quickly as thou canst across the sea, and tell Pilate, my servant and friend, to send me this physician to restore me to my original health..

Pilate answered the messenger, saying thus. This man was a malefactor, and a man who drew after himself all the people; so, after counsel taken of the wise men of the city, I caused him to be crucified..

Then Pontius Pilate was apprehended by command of Caesar and brought to Rome. Caesar, hearing that Pilate had come to Rome, was filled with exceeding wrath against him, and caused him to be brought to him.. Then the emperor commanded him to be kept in prison till he could take counsel with the wise men what ought to be done with him. And after a few days sentence was given against Pilate that he should be condemned to the most ignominious death.

When Pilate heard this he slew himself with his own dagger. and by such a death put an end to his life.

When Pilate's death was made known Caesar said, Truly he had died a most ignominious death, whose own hand has not spared

⁵¹ Rel. 2 pp 277-9

him. He was therefore fastened to a great block of stone and sunk in the river Tiber. But wicked and unclean spirits, rejoicing in his wicked and unclean body, all moved about in the water, and caused in the air dreadful lightning and tempests, thunder and hail so that all were seized with horrible fear. On which account the Romans dragged him out of the river Tiber, bore him away in derision to Vienne, and sunk him in the river Rhone. For Vienne means, as it were, Way of Gehanna, because it was then a place of cursing. And evil spirits were there and did same things.'⁵²

We have seen that the first story had made Pilate a martyr, whose head was received by angels coming down from heaven...

The second story however makes him a devil, who died by committing suicide, and the 'wicked and unclean spirits were rejoicing in his wicked and unclean body.'

Which one is true?!

This compels us to formulate a definite and a firm principle of dealing with religious books, narratives, and beliefs, that is, we must use our reason, logic and science, in their examination. Then only we can judge what is false, and what is true.

But when man is invited to set aside his reason and 'do all things with out grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation' (Phil 2 : 14-15); then we cannot be wrong in concluding that this is an invitation to eternal doom.



⁵² Ref. 2 : pp. 279-81

THE CHRIST AND THE ATTEMPTS TO KILL HIM

The Temptation of the Crucifixion:

In an exciting night, severe tempests blew furiously, filled with temptations and stumblings. There, 'the believers were sorely tried, and shaken with a mighty shock.'

In that night the Christ 'came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place he said to them: Pray that you may not enter into temptation.'

What he had done that night was familiar to him and to his disciples. He had practised that before, and many times, 'all night he continued in prayer to God.'

But the events that followed after that, were like a stone thrown into a calm lake, causing great turbulence. The turbulent waves blinded the sights of the Disciples for sometime, and are still blinding the sights of millions across the centuries up till now.

In that night, the disciples did not pray, as their teacher ordered them. Therefore they had entered into temptation, and the prophecy the Christ had uttered before: 'You will all fall away because of me this night,' was fulfilled.

All of them had fallen away that night that is why 'all the disciples forsook him and fled.'

The evil power had come at night 'with lanterns and torches and weapons,' to arrest the Christ.

While it was approaching the victim who was about to be arrested, an unexpected incident took place, and 'the arm of the Lord' intervened forcefully to fulfil the prophecies of the Christ's deliverance:

"Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone..

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and

honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.’ (Ps. 91)

The evil power was terribly shaken by the incident, that is why, ‘they drew back and fell to the ground.’

When they ‘came to themselves,’ they were highly astonished, for they had seen the Christ, the Servant of God ‘exalted and lifted up. very high.’

It was a great shock and a forbidding temptation. But the evil power had to arrest a man. Therefore they siezed one of those standing nearly and led him to the rulers. And after an artificial trial, he was crucified the next day. The witnesses of that crucifixion, were women, ‘looking from afar,’

Terror and doubt overwhelmed the disciples, both their Teacher, the Christ, and one of their band, Judas Iscariot, had suddenly disappeared. There was an incident of crucifixion, which they had never witnessed. They had nothing to do except to flee away from the expected persecution. Weeks and months went by, when the disciples and the followers tried to overcome that calamity. They began to teach the doctrines of their Teacher among the Jews. A couple of years later Paul declared himself an apostle and carried his gospel to the heathens of the Roman World.

Through decades, many disciples and followers died, many aliens declared themselves Christ’s disciples, divergent doctrines were taught, the oral traditions proved. unable to meet the need, therefore some began to write down their memoranda. In these circumstances the gospels began to be written.

Charles Dodd writes:

“It is often assumed that there was a time when the Church could think of the cross only as a disaster retrieved by the resurrection, and that only subsequent reflection found a positive meaning in it. It is impossible to deny that this may have been so.. At the earliest stage to which the evidence enables us to go back, Jesus is already thought of as the ‘Servant’ of Is. lii. 13-liii-12, whose death in utter obedience to God is for the redemption of the ‘Many.’ and issues in glory and exaltation.”⁵⁴

Many theories have been put to justify the crucifixion, trying to

⁵⁴ Ref 9 p 123

reverse its true picture as a defeat of the crucified into a victory, with no proof except the resurrection story based on the empty tomb.

Paul saw nothing in Christ's doctrines except the crucifixion.

Paul and the Notion of Killing the Christ :

Paul was responsible for the notion of pouring out the Christ's blood for the forgiveness of sins. He gave currency to that notion and considered it his gospel which he commenced to preach. When he began to write his letters, not less than 20 years after the departure of the Christ, he said:

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."—I Cor 2 : 2.

"I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for sins in accordance with the scriptures."—I Cor 15 : 3.

Paul built his theory on a base that is completely denied by the Christ that is abolishing the law:

"if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose."—Gal 2 : 21.

But the Christ said:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them all shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."—Mt 5 : 17-19.

And till the end of his ministry the Christ was faithful to the law:

"Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practise.'"—Mt 23 : 1-3.

The Christ declared that the law, justice, mercy and faith, were

neglected by the priesthood that shut the kingdom of heaven against the men:

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against the men, for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in..

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

—Mt 23 : 13-23.

One can easily prove that many had been righteous before the law of Moses, after the law and before the Christ had come. They were righteous because (i) they believed in God, (2) they were good-doers.

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.”—Gen 6 : 9.

“Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”—Gen 5 : 24.

The Christ has asserted that righteousness means good deeds and good speech:

“The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

—Mt 19 : 35-37.

It is now clear that Paul's theory of pouring out the Christ's blood, has no roots in Christ's doctrines.

But Paul succeeded in imposing his theories and belief on the growing Christian community.

He says:

“I think that I have the Spirit of God.”—I Cor 7 : 40.

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, But I will not be enslaved by any thing.”—I Cor 6 : 12; 10 : 23.

“Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life.”—I Cor 6 : 3

“The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God!”—I Cor 2 : 10

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men!”—I Cor 1 : 25.

And it is Paul, who confessed his disability to be released from his bodily sins:

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.. but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”—Rom 7 : 15-24.

The Christ's Prediction of his Passion :

The gospels, of which the earliest was written after Paul had begun his writings for more than 15 years, had been influenced by Paul's theory of pouring out the blood of Christ, as ransom for many.

As it was expected that the Christ would speak of his expected sufferings, **as part of his mission**, we find Mark, who was considered Paul's assistant (Philem 24), **has laid down**, what can be considered the base of Christ's predictions of his future sufferings. In an argument with the disciples who asked the Christ:

“Why do the scribes say that first Eli'jah must come? And he said to them, ‘Eli'jah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Eli'jah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”—Mk 9 : 11-13.

Matthew has copied this phrase from Mark, with some alterations, as shown below:

“So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.”—Mt 17 : 12.

Luke records:

“And he said to his disciples, ‘The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it.. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.’”—Lk 17 : 22-25.

The previous passage of Eli’jah’s rejection, raises many problems.

“The Old Testament contains no suggestion that Elijah when he returned would be rejected. The identification of John the Baptist as Elijah obviously provided an answer to one Jewish objection against Jesus’ Messiahship; whether it goes back to John the Baptist himself, or even to the period of Jesus’ ministry, is a much discussed question; the early Church itself was divided in its opinion on the matter—cf. John 1.”⁵⁵

Malachi’s prophecy, which the Jewish priesthood had raised against the Christ, and made his disciple ask him for explanation, was:

“Behold, I will send you Eli’jah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”—4 : 5-6.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke (1 : 15-17), have all agreed that Eli’jah had come back in the person of John the baptizer. But John denies this strongly:

“And this is the testimony of John (the baptizer), when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed.. ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Eli’jah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ They said to him then, ‘Who are you?’.. He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.’”—Jn 1 : 19-25.

If we ignore the previous passage with its problems, and study

⁵⁵ Ref. 6 : p. 241

what the gospels say of the Christ's predictions, or more accurately his expectations of the coming sufferings, we find that his saying:

The Son of man 'must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation,' had been developed by Matthew into a prediction of crucifixion.

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified."—Mt 20 : 18-19.

"It is only in Matthew that Jesus explicitly predicts his death by crucifixion."⁵⁶

Also it was he, Matthew, who developed the prophecy of Jonah, into a 3-days false prophecy.

It began in Mark:

"The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.'" 8 : 11-12.

Luke made some additions:

"When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nin'evah, so will the Son of man be to this generation.'" 12 : 29-30.

But Matthew developed it fully when he said:

"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.' But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah: was three days and three nights in the belly of whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" 12 : 38-40.

We have already seen the falseness of this prophecy.

There now remains the prediction attributed to Christ, that the Son

⁵⁶ Ref. 7 : p. 323

of man will suffer many things and be rejected by his generation. What does this statement and the others like it mean?

Charles Dodd writes:

“Jesus is recorded to have predicted sufferings in store for Himself and His followers. It is often plausibly held that the forebodings of His own death which are repeatedly attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are of the nature of *vaticania ex eventu*.

The Church could not believe that their Lord had been ignorant of what lay before him. It may freely be conceded that the precision of some of these predictions may be due to the Church's subsequent knowledge of the facts..

We may observe (1) that the whole prophetic and apocalyptic tradition, which Jesus certainly recognized, anticipated tribulation, for the people of God before the final triumph of the good cause; (2) that the history of many centuries had deeply implanted the idea that the prophet is called to suffering as a part of his mission; (3) that the death of John the Baptist had shown that this fate was still part of the prophetic calling; and (4) that it needed, not supernatural prescience, but the ordinary insight of an intelligent person, to see whether things were tending, at least during the later stages of the ministry.

When now we turn to the Gospel records we find that in all four of the main sources, or strands of tradition, which criticism recognizes, there are forecasts of persecution for the followers of Jesus, both direct and indirect..

The various contexts in which they occur leave it possible to doubt whether the sufferings anticipated were expected to come almost immediately, or at a later date. For example one group of such predictions occurs in Matthew in the Charge given to the Twelve when they were sent out to preach and heal (X.17-22), and in Mark in the final discourse (XIII. 9-13), just before the death of Jesus. In the latter case they are clearly taken to refer to the persecution of the Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and elsewhere. In the former case the impression is that persecution might break out at any moment, perhaps even while the Twelve were out on their mission.. But it is noteworthy that a call to endure sufferings is in several passages of Mark and Luke associated with the theme of a journey to Jerusalem (Mk.X 31-45, Lk.IX.51-62, XIII.22-24, XIV.25-33); and indeed the impression which we

gather from the Gospels as a whole is that Jesus led His followers up to the city with the express understanding that a crisis awaited them there which could involve acute suffering both for them and for him. The most striking of such passages is (Mk.X.35-40.) Here the sons of Zebedee are assured that they shall drink of the cup of which their Master drinks, and be baptized with his baptism. The purport of the words is not doubtful. The disciples are to share the fate of their Master, and surely to share His fate in the crisis which lies immediately before them. In point of fact the followers of Jesus did not at that crisis share His fate..

The prediction that the brothers (sons of Zebedee) should share the fate of their Master is one which was not, in its natural sense, fulfilled..

In a passage which occurs in slightly differing forms in Mark and the common material of Matthew and Luke, and therefore possesses the combined attestation of our two best sources, Jesus speaks of the coming sufferings of His disciples in the form of a call to 'bear the cross (Mk.VIII.34, reproduced in Mt.XVI.24, Lk.IX.23; Mt.X38 = Lk.XIV.27). As the cross was an only too familiar method of execution under Roman government, the suggestion is that He wished to prepare them not only for suffering but for death..

It is no doubt possible to take the view that the predictions which we find in the Gospels are no more than a reflection of the experience of the early Church within which the tradition was formed. It is certain at least that some of them have been coloured by this experience. But we know that Jesus, was widely regarded as a prophet, and prediction was a part of the traditional role of a prophet. Moreover, there seem to be traces of predictions attributed to Him which were not infact fulfilled."⁵⁷

The Christ Resisted All Attempts to Kill Him :

Since the beginning of his ministry, the gospels tell, that the Christ had resisted from time to time, all attempts to kill him, and condemned it clearly.

He had done much, and took all possible actions, in order that all attempts to hunt and kill him might fail.

⁵⁷ Ref. 10 pp. 41-7

“About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marvelled at it, saying, ‘How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?’ So Jesus answered them, ‘My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?.. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you.. If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did.” Jn 7 : 14-19; 8 : 37-40.

As the Christ had been afraid that he might be killed, he took all possible precautions against the attempts of the Jews.

“But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how to destroy him. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there.” Mt 12 : 14-15.

“they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.” Jn 8 : 59.

“After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him.” Jn 8 : 1.

“So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called E’phraim; and there he stayed with the disciples.” Jn 11 : 53-55.

In the critical hours, the last hours when the Christ was among men, he cried with all his power asking for safety and deliverance. The notion of pouring out his blood had nothing to do with his true message. It is nothing but a false notion attached to his message in later stages.

The gospels show that in the last hours, the Christ felt that he was overwhelmed by a terrible nightmare, whenever he thought of being killed.

This is evident from the following:

- 1 At the end of the period just before the arrest, the last prayer of the Christ was:**

“And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Jn 17 : 3.

This monotheistic prayer was directly followed by the words meaning that his mission has been accomplished.

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." Jn 17 : 4.

So, the mission of the Christ was complete before crucifixion. Who can deny, this clear testimony?!

2 In the garden, every scene asserts his refusal to be killed, and shows clearly how he was terrified when he felt that he was about to be hunted.

"And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb'edee he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.' And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.'" Mt 26 : 37-39; Lk 22 : 43-44.

3 After the Christ had felt the approaching danger, his cry to his disciples was:

"Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." Mk 14 : 42.

He had asked his disciples to rise and help him in getting away from the approaching disaster, but they failed to help him; they were sleeping 'for their eyes were heavy.'

4 When Judas came with the evil power and went up to the Christ and kissed him, 'Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why are you here?'

5 In the trial "the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council, and said, 'If you are the Christ, tell us.' But he said to them, 'If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer (me, nor let me go : A.V.)." Lk 22 : 66-68.

On considering this passage, one can very well imagine that the answer of the man whom the elders of the people had asked could not be other than the following:

(a) Yes, I am the Christ, or (b) No, I am not the Christ. Every traditional belief in the crucified Christ will not accept the answer (b). The plausible answer (a), can be put in the following form: 'He said to them : Yes I am the Christ but you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer me, nor let me go.'

Whatever the form of the answer, the inevitable result follows:

Assuming that the Christ was the man whom the Jewish elders were questioning, it is quite clear that that man was asking for letting him get away. So there is no place at all for such sayings that the Christ had come 'to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Again, if we consider answer (b), it can be put in the following form:

'He said to them : No, I am not the Christ whom you seek, but you will not believe; and if I ask you to release me, you will not answer me nor let me go.' This also negatives the 'ransom' theory. All that can be said whatever the case, about this trial, cancels all theories put to justify the crucifixion and make it look like a voluntary action of the Christ.

6 Coming to the last testimony, the gospels attribute to the crucified, in his last breath, his saying :

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?!

Who hearing this cry of despair, censure and blame, can claim that the crucified 'gave himself as a ransom for all'; 'became obedient unto death, even death on a cross?' as Paul says in his letter.

About 2000 years ago, the Christ stood teaching the Jewish priesthood, the will of God. He said to them : 'Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" Mt 9 : 13.

But even today, there are those who ignore the truth and refuse the mercy and insist on the sacrifice.

THE PROPHECIES OF THE CHRIST THAT HE WILL BE SAVED FROM KILLING

We have seen in the previous section, that the notion of the Christ's killing was alien to his message, and he had done all he could against it.

In this section we will mention some prophecies of the Christ which assert his safety and deliverance from the plot of his enemies. They are simple prophecies, needing no commentary :

- 1 **“The Pharisees heard the crowd thus muttering about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said, ‘I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me; you will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come.’”**

This saying is clear that the Jews will seek him for killing, but they will fail to do so because he will go to a place where they cannot follow him. He will go up into heaven, in a manner similar to that of Eli'jah.

The Jews thought that he was speaking of a special place, but they could not realize the truth.

“The Jews said to one another, ‘Where does this man intend to go that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’” Jn 7 : 33-36.

- 2 **In a succeeding challenging situation between the Jews and the Christ :**

“Again he said to them, ‘I go away, and you will seek me and die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.’ Then said the Jews, ‘Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’.. Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me.

'And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.' Jn 8 : 21-29.

But that man on the cross who cried, saying:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," was surely somebody other than the Christ, who claimed confidently that : **'he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone.'**

3 The last sayings of the Christ were:

"The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jn 16 : 32-33.

We know that the man on the cross was overcome by his evil enemies. Therefore he should be some man other than the Christ, who asserts that he has overcome the world.

4 And, in his last controversy with the Jews, the Christ challenged them saying:

"I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed' is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Mt 23 : 39.

The challenge is big and clear : the Jewish priesthood will not see the Christ again, till his second coming 'with power and great glory.' But that crucified man, was once again seen by and in the hands of the chief priests and elders captive during the trials, victim of mockery, scourging, crucifixion, and finally a dead body.

Truly, what the Christ had prophesied of his safety is a confirmation of what the Psalms had previously predicted, as we have seen before, and we are going to see in the following section.

THE PROPHECIES OF THE PSALMS THAT THE CHRIST WILL BE SAVED FROM KILLING

More than 50 years had passed before Luke began to write his letters to his 'most excellent Theoph'ilus,' which came to be known as the gospel according to Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Acts, Luke said:

"In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, 'Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before hand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out..) For it is written in the book of Psalm, 'Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it.' and 'His office let another take.'" 1 : 15-20.

Peter, here, is speaking of Psalm 109, from the book of Psalms, which is considered the most quoted book of the Old Testament.

From this book, the writers of the gospels and other New Testament books—have coloured their stories, especially those of the passion of Christ and crucifixion narratives. And from this book quotations have been used, explicitly or implicitly.

We will study a number of Psalms that concern the subject of this section. For our study each Psalm will be divided into numbered items, which will be referred to as its serial number when speaking of its contents.

Introduction to the Study of the Psalms :

In this study, we should take into account some simple and generally accepted rules:

1. The book of Psalms like many other books of the Old Testament—even all religious books in general—contains many similes, proverbs and expressions, that are mostly intended to give a general notion or reflection, and in many cases, it may have weak or no relation with its literal meaning. However, this does not altogether cancel the literal meaning

which has priority in cases that may be supported by precedents.

The following are examples of some expressions and their generally accepted concepts:

- (a) "ability to control the sea and subdue tempests was regarded as one of the characteristic signs of divine power; cf. Pss. 89⁸⁻⁹, 93³⁻⁴, 106⁸⁻⁹ and Isa. 51^{9,10}.
- (b) the image of a storm, of great waters, was frequently used as a metaphor for the evil forces active in the world, and particularly for the tribulations of the righteous, from which only the power of God could save them, cf. Pss. 69^{1,2,14-15}, 18¹⁶, etc.
- (c) the complete confidence in God the religious man ought always to display can be expressed by saying that even in the most terrible storm he will not doubt God's power and determination to save him; cf. Isa. 43², Pss. 46¹⁻³, 65⁵, and on the whole matter see carefully Ps. 107²³⁻³².

Two other points from the Old Testament should be noticed. The ability to sleep peacefully and untroubled is a sign of perfect trust in the sustaining and protective power of God; cf. Prov. 3²³⁻²⁴, Pss. 4⁸ and 3⁵, also Job 11¹⁸⁻¹⁹ and Lev. 26⁶. But there were sometimes moments of national or personal disaster when it **hardly** seemed possible to have such trust, when it almost seemed as if God had lost interest in his people, and had ceased to watch over them. At such times they would speak of God as being 'asleep' and they did not hesitate to call upon him to 'wake up' and busy himself to help them; cf. Ps. 44²³⁻²⁴ 'Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord,' also Pss. 35²³, 59⁴, and Isa. 51^{9,10}.⁵⁸

- 2 The picture of that servant imploring God that He may save him from death at the hands of his enemy, is frequently repeated in the Psalms. Death here, no doubt, should mean unnatural death, or in other words, it is death before the assigned time for the natural death; it is killing. This is because men can never escape natural death, which is the destiny of all creatures. But all men, whether good or evil, fear being killed, that black gate which leads them to death. This sort of death by killing is almost preceded by alarms and

⁵⁸ Rel 6 - pp 146-7

signs that compel the man exposed to it to seek refuge—instinctively in God, asking for deliverance from that death which is feared to come before due time!

- 3 Many Psalms are attributed to David, and many of them are considered prophecies of the forthcoming history of the Christ. It is known that its numbering was done a number of centuries after David. About the numbring there is disagreement as seen from the comparison between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek Version of the Old Testament (Septuagint):

| Hebrew | Greek |
|---------|---------|
| 1—8 | 1—8 |
| 9—10 | 9 |
| 11—113 | 10—112 |
| 114—115 | 113 |
| 116 | 114—115 |
| 117—146 | 116—145 |
| 147 | 146—147 |
| 148—150 | 148—150 |

Thus most of the Psalms in the Greek Version are numbered one behind their equivalent in the Hebrew one. This is due to combining of two Psalms together (9 and 10 of the Hebrew) into one (9 in the Greek). Whatever the case, what is important is that one of the Psalms should not be contradicted by another. And the picture painted by one Psalm should be made more clear by the other.

We have already spoken of three Psalms : 34,41 and 91. Now we proceed to study some more, 10 Psalms, in order that the truth may be made clear.

This is an indispensable introduction to the study of the Psalms.

Psalm 9 :

1. "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in thee. I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High.
2. When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before thee. For thou hast maintained my just cause; thou hast sat on the throne giving righteous judgment.. thou hast

destroyed the wicked; thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever. The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins..

3. The Lord is stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know thy name put their trust in thee, for thou, O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee..
- 4 Be gracious to me, O Lord! Behold what I suffer from those who hate me,
O thou who liftest me from the gates of death, that I may recount all thy praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in thy deliverance.
5. The nations have sunk in the pit which thy made, in the net which they hid has their own foot been caught. The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.
The wicked shall depart to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.
6. For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.”

The preface of the Psalm (Stanza 1) shows that it is a report about the deliverance of a righteous servant, who is rejoicing and praising God for the wonderful deed He has done for his safety.

This servant has enemies who ‘took counsel together in order to arrest him by stealth and kill him.’

Stanza 2 and 3 show what happened to them when they sought him for death; they turned back, then stumbled and perished.

One of them, that wicked, has been destroyed, and vanished forever. He has sunk in the pit which he had made, and his feet were caught in the net which he had hid.

The cross was the weapon of death under the Roman rule, so was the pit and the hidden net.

That righteous servant was about to die, that is why he cried : ‘O thou who liftest me from the gates of death.’ Surely, if he was arrested and captured by his enemies, this would have been the first gate of death and if he was put on the cross, this would be the last gate of death. The deliverance of this servant is a godly deed, he has nothing to do, in return except giving thanks with his whole heart. So, stanza 6 ends the Psalm in a way similar to its preface. Both

assert the answering of the righteous servant and the realisation of his deliverance.

John has cited this Psalm when he described what had happened to the evilpower that came to arrest the Christ. He said : 'they drew back and fell to the ground.'

Also the writer of the letter to the Hebrews used this Psalm: 'thou O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee.. O thou who liftest me from the gates of death,' when he wrote: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him he was heard for his godly fear;" Heb 5 : 7.

Thus, this Psalm is a prophecy that the Christ will be heard for his godly fear and consequently delivered. His betrayer will be hunted instead of him and sunk in the pit he made, with his foot caught in the hidden net.

Psalm 16 :

1. "Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge. I say to the Lord, 'Thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee'..
2. Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows, their libations of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.
3. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup, thou holdest my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage..
4. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For thou does not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit (corruption). Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures forever."

This Psalm is considered a prophecy about the Christ, as in Acts 13 : 33-37. First we have to explain the meanings of some words, as they are used in the Bible:

Shoel : means a place of final death:

"Her feet (a loose woman) go down to death; her steps follow the path to Soel." Prov 5 : 5.

Pit : means corruption (A.V.) and perishableness, a place of 'dead men's bone and all uncleanness.'

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable.” I Cor 15 : 42-52.

When we consider this Psalm, we find the righteous servant is praying to the Lord to preserve him from coming evils (stanza 1).

Stanza 3 and 4 tell how he is confident of his Lord's answer, that is why he 'shall not be moved, his heart is glad, and his soul rejoices.' The cup which he is going to taste is that of 'fullness of joy.' It is the desired cup, not like that which the Christ was praying earnestly to pass from him.

The picture of this trustful servant who 'kept the lord always before him, because He is at his right hand, he shall not be moved,' is completely different from that of the collapsed man who cried, in despair, on the cross saying : 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?!.'

His saying : 'thou does not give me up to Shoel, or let thy godly one see the Pit,' means that he will be saved from the **approaching** death, and consequently the crucified man who died on the cross, was somebody other than the Christ. The body of that crucified man saw corruption : he was scourged, a crown of thorns was put on his head, his body was hung on the cross with nails (John 20 : 25), before he was to come down, 'one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and atonce there came out blood and water,' and finally he died and was buried in a tomb. He saw corruption more than usual. No one can believe that such a body is the body of the man of whom the Psalm says:

'my body also dwells secure.'

Any 'libations of blood, the Christ will not pour out.' He taught people the significance of the heavenly message, when he said : "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" But those who speak of him, like Paul, saying:

"While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son." Rom 5 - 10.

"God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." Col 2 : 13.

“But when; Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come.. he entered once for all into the Holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” Heb 9 : 11-12.

According to this Psalm, the Christ never pours out blood, but like all good believers, he can only pour his soul, not his blood. The story of Hannah affirms this.

“Eli the high priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts.. remember me.. give to thy maid servant a son.. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard, therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.. Hannah answered, I am a woman sorely troubled.. I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.’” I Sam 1 : 9-15.

All those, who speak of pouring out the blood of Christ, are his enemies, who ‘multiply their sorrows.’

The Christ, like any other righteous, pours out his soul before the Lord, not his blood. David has predicted in Psalm 30, what the Christ will say, when he feels the approaching death:

“I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast drawn me up,
and hast not let my foes rejoice over me..
To thee, O Lord I made supplication:
‘What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise thee?
Will it tell of thy faithfulness?
O Lord, be thou my helper!”

In this Psalm - exactly as in the other preceding and following Psalms — its preface asserts the deliverance of the Christ and his victory over his enemies whom God ‘hast not let them rejoice over him.’ His claim is just and logical : ‘What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee?’ Surely, these words will remain a declaration of truth, a reminder to those who refuse mercy and desire sacrifice.

Psalm 20 :

1. **“ The Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion!
May he remember all your offerings.. May he grant you your heart’s desire, and fulfil all your plans!**
2. **Now I know that the Lord will help (saveth : A.V.) his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven, with mighty victories by his right hand.**
3. **Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God. They will collapse and fall; but we shall rise and stand upright.”**

The preface of the Psalm (stanza 1) shows that David is praying for another person, a righteous servant, or more precisely: ‘his anointed,’ that is the Christ, of whom Psalm 2 says:

“Why do nations conspire, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.’”

Psalm 2, which is quoted in Acts 4 : 25-26, like all other Psalms, predicts the failure of the conspiracy against the Christ. It says:

“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.”

Again, in Psalm 20 the impending trouble is to come from the conspiring enemies; stanza 3 shows that they have military power, e.g. ‘chariots and horses,’ while that of the suffering servant is merely spiritual: ‘we boast of the name of the Lord.’

In the critical moment the arm of the Lord intervenes and performs a miracle, mentioned in Psalm 18, as follows:

“He reached from on high; he took me, he drew me out of many waters.

He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me.

They came upon me in the day of my calamity; but the Lord was my stay.

He brought me forth into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.”

* A. V. : ‘He sent from above.’

Truivy, David's saying: 'Now I know that the Lord will help (or:saveth) his anointed,' is the pulse of revelation felt by him, to predict what will happen to the Christ on that coming day: 'the day of trouble.'

Psalm 21 :

1. "In thy strength the king rejoices, O Lord;
and in thy help how greatly he exults!
Thou hast given him his heart's desire,
and hast not withheld the request of his lips.
He asked life of thee; thou gavest it to him,
length of days for ever and ever.
2. His glory is great through thy help;
splendour and majesty thou dost bestow upon him..
For the king trusts in the Lord; and through the steadfast
love of the Most High he shall not be moved.
3. Your hand will find out all your enemies;
your right hand will find out those who hate you..
You will destroy their offspring from the earth;
and their children from among the sons of men.
If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will
not succeed.
For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces
with your bows.
4. Be exalted, O Lord, in thy strength!
We will sing and praise thy power."

This Psalm is complementary to Psalm 20. The preface of the earlier one begins with a prayer for the suffering servant, and the preface of this Psalm 21, asserts the answering and deliverance of the righteous.

In his sufferings, the Christ prayed earnestly that the cup of death may pass from him.

Stanza 1 says: 'He asked life of thee; thou gavest it to him.' So that the cup of death was passed from him, and he was given 'lengths of days for ever and ever.'

Very significant is the saying of the Psalm : 'If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed.'

This is a clear indication that the plot against the Christ will be a complete failure. What is waiting for those conspirators is the

destruction of their 'offspring from the earth'..This is what happened to Judas Iscariot, who perished and was cut off from the sons of men.

Psalm 22:

This is considered as one of the most quoted Psalms from which the New Testament writers have coloured their story of crucifixion.

It is cited in : Mk 15 : 24,29,34; Mt 6 : 13;27 : 43,46; Lk 23 : 35; Jn 14 : 24; Heb 2 : 12;5 : 7. Also it is cited in many other places of the New Testament.

King James' Version mentions in its preface that this Psalm contains three main elements:

- 1.. David complaineth in great discouragement.
2. He prayeth in great distress.
3. He praiseth God.

The Severe Trial of David:

This Psalm is nothing but a report by David about a severe trial which was about to cause his death at the hands of his enemies, unless God saved him. The story of this trial is reported in I Samuel.

"David said in his heart, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.'

So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to A'chish the son of Ma'och, king of Gath.. And David dwelt with A'chish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household..

Then David said to A'chish, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there.. So that day A'chish gave him Ziklag..

Now David and his men went up, and made raids upon the Gesh'urites, the Gir'Zites, and the Amal'ekites; for these were the inhabitants of the land from old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the asses, the camels, and the garments, and came back to A'chish.'" I Sam 27 : 1-9.

As David made raids upon the Amal'ekites, and others, it was expected that this people would come back to fight with David and his men. This is what had happened, as will be seen later

And during the time David was a refugee at Ziklag, strong warriors joined him, Benjaminites, Gadites, and some of the men of Manas'seh, who are described in I Chron:

"Now these are the men who came to David at Ziklag, while he could not move about freely because of Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men who helped him in war.. From the Gadites there went over to David at the stronghold in the wilderness mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were swift as gazelles upon the mountains..

These Gadites were officers of the army, the lesser over a hundred and the greater over a thousand. These are the men who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it was over flowing all its banks, and put to fight all those in the valleys, to the east and to the west..

Some of the men of Manas'seh deserted to David when he came with the Philistines for the battle against Saul. They helped David against the band of raiders; for they were all mighty men of valour, and were commanders in the army..

For from day to day men kept coming to David to help him, until there was a great army, like an army of God." I Chron 12 : 1-22.

The men who joined David, the Gadites, 'mighty and experienced warriors whose faces were like the faces of lions;' and those of Manas'seh 'were all mighty men of valour.' They all made 'a great army like an army of God.'

If this great army rose against David, for some reason or other, it would be a great disaster to him. This was what had actually happened.

When we turn back a little, to the time of Moses, we find that he had given the land of Bashan, across the Jordan, to the sons of Gad and the sons of Manas'seh.

"And Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad, and to the sons of Reuben and to the half-tribe of Manas'seh the sons of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land and its cities with their territories. the cities of the land throughout the country." Num 32 33

When the sons of such men rise in fury against David he describes them, truly, when he says:

‘Strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.’

The severe trial of David came when he and his men were absent from Ziklag, for some days, through which the Amal’ekites carried raid upon it, and destroyed it wholly. Then, David’s men rose against him violently and spoke of stoning him.

“Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amal’ekites had made a raid upon the Negeb and upon Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag, and burnt it with fire, and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great; they killed no one, but carried them off, and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep. David’s two wives also had been taken captive.. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” I Sam 30 : 1-6.

According to the practice of all men—especially the believers - David had no refuge, except in ‘the Lord, his God.’ He prayed earnestly, and God answered him, and helped him to conquer his enemies, the Amal’ekites.

“David recovered all that the Amal’ekites had taken; and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken; David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds; and the people drove those cattle before him and said, ‘This is David’s spoil.’” I Sam 30 : 18-20.

Recording of the Trial:

Psalm 22 :

David has recorded his severe trial, which ended with his full victory, in Psalm 22.

He said:

- 1 " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
 Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of
 my:groaning (roaring:A.V.)?
 O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer;
 and by night : but find no rest (and am not silent:A.V.).
 Yet thou art holy, enthroned on the praise of Israel.
 In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou didst
 deliver them.
 To thee they cried, and were saved; in thee they
 trusted, and were not disappointed.
2. But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and
 despised by the people.
 All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me,
 they wag their heads;
 'He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver
 him, let him rescue him for he delights in him!'
 Yet thou art he who took me from the womb; thou
 didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts.
 Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother
 bore me thou hast been my God.
 Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to
 help.
3. Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan
 surround me; they open wide their mouths at me,
 like a ravening and roaring lion.
4. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are
 out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted:
 within my breast (in the midst of my bowels:A.V.);
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my
 tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me
 in the dust of death.
5. Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encir-
 cle me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—(like a lion : Heb)
 I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments
 among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.

6. But thou, O Lord, be not far off!
 O thou my help, hasten to my aid!
 Deliver my soul from the sword, my life (Heb : my only one)
 from the power of the dog!
 Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted
 soul from the horns of the wild oxen!
7. I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the
 midst of the congregation I will praise thee:
 You who fear the Lord, praise him!
 all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand
 in awe of him, all you sons of Israel!
 For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the af-
 flicted;
 and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when
 he cried to him.
 From thee come my praise in the great congregation;
 my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
 May your hearts live forever! ..
8. Men shall tell of the Lord to the coming
 generation, and proclaim his deliverance to
 a people yet unborn,
 that he has wrought it."

Most scholars believe, as stated before :

"Taken as a whole, this Psalm is anything but a cry of despair; it is the prayer of a righteous sufferer who yet trusts fully in the Love and protection of God and is confident of being vindicated by him (cf. especially VV. 19-26, particularly VV.24 and 26). There is some evidence that among the ancient Jews the opening words of this Psalm were interpreted in the light of the rest of it and recognized as an effective form of prayer for help in time of trouble."⁵⁹

In addition to what is stated above— it is quite sufficient to consider the following:

- 1 It is clear that verse 16; 'they have pierced my hands and feet,' is confused in the Greek; and the Hebrew text gives

⁵⁹ R.C.P. 6: p. 428

instead : 'both my hands like a lion,' which gives a completely different meaning. This calls us to doubt the widespread translations of this Psalm, and suggests that parts of it, at least, should have been distorted so as to suit the story of the crucifixion.

The text of Psalm 22, used above, is from R.S.V., which is different in some words, from that of A.V. Both are also different from another new translation of the Psalms, as shown below :

| Old Translation (A.V.) | New Translation |
|---|---|
| 15. My strength is dried up like apotsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws ; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. | 16. Parched as burnt clay is my throat, my tongue cleaves to my jaws. - |
| 16. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. | 17. Many dogs have surrounded me, a band of the wicked beset me. They tear holes in my hands and my feet. 16c. and lay me in the dust of death. |
| 20. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. | 21. Rescue my soul from the grip of these dogs. |

- 2 Even if the statement : 'they have pierced my hands and feet,' is accepted in its present form, it cannot be taken literally. It is used in the Psalm to express the state of overwhelming pain being felt by the suffering servant, exactly like other expressions used here : 'I am poured out like water—all my bones are out of joint—my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast (or : in the midst of my bowels). All these expressions do not express the state of a crucified man, because he is neither poured out like water, nor his heart is melted in the midst of his bowels. All the organs of a crucified man's body are unseparated till the last breath. He dies due to haemorrhage and unbearable pains.

3 In his description of the procedure of crucifying a victim, Nideham writes:

“The precise procedure (of crucifixion) varied according to circumstances, but normally, after being scourged and stripped of all his clothes (which became the perquisite of the executioners), the victim was laid on the ground while his outstretched arms were fixed to the cross - beam by either nails or thongs. Next the cross—beam was lifted up, with the body on it, and fixed either on the top of the upright (T) or across it (†), and the feet were then fastened (at this period with thongs rather than nails, despite Luke 24,³⁹⁻⁴⁰ which may have been influenced by Ps. 22¹⁶—contrast John 20²⁰ and 25); usually a block of wood was fixed half - way up the upright to support the hanging body. Death, which was due to exhaustion, might not follow for a great many hours.”⁶²

Luke spoke of the terrible doubt the disciples had, as regards the narrative of the appearance of the Christ, to whom he attributed :

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ (And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet).” 24 : 39-40.

Luke, no doubt, has been affected with some words of Psalm 22: ‘they have pierced my hands and feet,’ and used it literally, irrespective of its contradiction with the historical back ground of the Psalm and its general contents. Luke also is in disagreement on this point with John whose narrative shows that the feet were not pierced with nails, as they were fastened with thongs.

“When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.. Now Thomas.. was not with them.. he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Jn 20 : 20-25.

The Bible says to the Sons of Israel :

“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes.. the

⁶² Ref. 6 - p 423

heavens over your head shall be brass, and the earth under you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down upon you until you are destroyed." Deut 28 : 15-24.

Many times have the Israelites disobeyed and were cursed, none witnessed 'the heavens over their head became brass, nor the earth under them became iron.'

So taking the statements of this Psalm as literally true is completely wrong.

- 4 Casting lots to divide the spoil has been a common practice across the centuries, and among different peoples. Moses has frequently used it.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'To these the land shall be divided for inheritance according to the number of names.. the land shall be divided by lot.. Their inheritance shall be divided according to lot.'" Num 26 : 52-56.

And as a married man or woman is considered a raiment (or vesture) of the other (Gen 2 : 23-24; Lev 15 : 16-18; I Cor 11 : 3,15), then when David said, 'they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots,' he was speaking of his two wives and the other wives of his men whom the Amal'ekite had taken captive. They were enjoying themselves with the spoils they had taken by dividing and casting lots.

"They were spread abroad overall the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight until the evening of the next day.. David recovered all that the Amal'ekites had taken." I Sam 30 : 16-18.

- 5 Matthew misunderstood this Psalm when he said :

"They divided his garments among them by casting lots, (that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots : A.V.)." 27 : 35.

- 6 The 'strong bulls of Bashan,' the sons of Gad and Manas'seh, were all from the lost ten tribes of Israel, who were swallowed by the Assyrian captivity in 721 B.C. So none of their

descendants were present at the crucifixion which took place after more than 750 years in Jerusalem. They had neither 'surrounded the Christ nor they opened wide their mouths at him like a ravening and roaring lion,' for the simple reason that they all had perished long ago.

- 7 In spite of all that can be understood from statements like : 'they have pierced my hands and feet' and 'they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots,' we find that we have just finished stanza 5, where the suffering servant is still alive.

That is why in stanza 6, he makes a definite appeal : 'Deliver my soul from the sword.'

- 8 Then we come to stanza 7, which asserts the deliverance of the suffering servant, and answering his request : 'For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him.'

Conclusion.

- 1 Psalm 22, with all its details, deals with specific events of David, and records a severe trial which took place when he was a refugee at Ziklag, where he was about to perish. But God answered his prayer and 'delivered his soul from the sword,' and his life from death.
- 2 After David, this Psalm became, in the Israelite traditions, a prayer of a righteous sufferer who yet trusts fully in the protection of God and is confident of being vindicated by him. It became an effective form of prayer for help in the time of trouble.
- 3 If this Psalm is considered a prophecy about the future event of the Christ coming after David, it should be considered a prophecy of the deliverance of the Christ who was suffering in the garden, and praying earnestly that the cup of death, with all its pains and horror, passes from him. The Psalm says that God 'has not hid his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him.'
- 4 Surely, this Psalm is a prophecy for the future as told in VV. 30,31 (stanza 8): 'men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet un-

born, that he has wrought it.'

'A people yet unborn,' can never mean the people of Israel. Both Christians and Muslims believe in the Christ who was born from the Virgin Mary. So the people yet unborn' should mean either the Christians or the Muslims. But the Christians believe that : the 'Cup' had not passed from the Christ, his request of saving his soul was not answered, his cries were not heard and finally he died on the cross.

The Muslims, on the other hand, believe that Christ's prayer was heard, his request was granted, and finally he was saved and some body else was crucified.

Therefore, the 'people yet unborn' who believe in his deliverance, are none else but the Muslims.

But those who believe and say like Paul:

"He (God) who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all." Rom 8 : 32, can never be regarded as the 'people yet unborn' who believe in his deliverance.

Finally, Psalm 22 can never be a prophecy except that of the deliverance of the Christ and saving his soul from death.

He who is still in doubt of that is advised to read Psalm 4 of David which says : "know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him."

Psalm 31 :

- 1 In thee, O Lord, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame; in thy righteousness deliver me ! ..
take me out of the net which is hidden for me, for thou art my refuge.
Into thy hand I commit my spirit;
2. thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God
I will rejoice and be glad for thy steadfast love,
because thou hast seen my affliction
thou hast taken heed of my adversities
and hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
thou hast set my feet in a broad place.

- 3 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my
 years with sighing;..
 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror
 to my neighbours, those who see me in the
 street flee from me.
 Yea, I hear the whispering of many —
 terror on every side ! —
 as they scheme together against me,
 as they plot to take my life.
- 4 But I trust in thee, O Lord, I say, 'Thou art
 my God.' My times are in thy hand,
 deliver me from the hand of my enemies
 and persecuters !
- 5 Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for
 I call on thee;
 let the wicked be put to shame, let them
 go dumb founded to Sheol.
 Let the lying lips be dumb, which speak
 insolently against the righteous in pride
 and contempt.
- 6 O how abundant is thy goodness, which thou
 hast laid up for those who fear thee,
 and wrought for those who take refuge in thee,
 in the sight of the sons of men !
 In the covert of thy presence thou hidest them
 from the plots of men; thou holdest them
 safe under thy shelter from the strife of
 tongues.
 Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously
 shown his steadfast love to me, when I was
 beset as in a besieged city.
 I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from
 thy sight.' But thou didst hear my supplications.
 when I cried to thee for help.
- 7 Love the Lord, all you his saints !
 The Lord preserves the faithful..
 Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
 all you who wait for the Lord !'

This Psalm is considered a prediction about Christ in his last hours.

“Verse 13, ‘They took counsel together against me; they devised to take away my life,’ has helped to mould Matthew’s account of the conspiracy of the Sanhedrin, XXVI. 3-4.”⁶⁴

Matthew said:

“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered.. and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.”

This Psalm was also cited by Mark, 15 : 37; Luke, 23 : 46; and others.

The preface of this Psalm (stanza 1) begins with a prayer of the righteous servant - the Christ - to God, that He may deliver him from a plot ‘schemed to take his life’ (stanza 3), carried out by evildoers whom he cursed (stanza 5).

Stanzas 4 and 5 mention an important thing, that is, if the plot succeeded, the righteous servant will be put to shame forever.

Those who believe that the Christ was arrested mocked, scourged, and killed on the cross, not only did they put him to shame, but they also made him a curse forever.

But this is what Paul actually taught in his letters, and many still follow him and repeat his doctrines:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us - for it is written (in the Law), ‘Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.’ Gal 3 : 13.

Stanzas 2 and 6 mention the deliverance of the righteous servant who ‘rejoices and is glad because God has seen his affliction, and has not delivered him into the hands of the enemy.’ His deliverance was wonderful, for God ‘has set his feet in a broad place, and he was beset as in a besieged city.’ This means that the Christ ‘went up into heaven,’ like Eli’jah, a wonderful deed of God.

Stanza 3 : ‘I am a horror to my neighbours, those who see me in the street flee from me,’ speaks of the disciples of the Christ, who all

⁶⁴ Ref. 9 - p 9A

'forsook him and fled' when the evilpower came to arrest him.

Such saying : 'Into thy hand I commit my spirit—My times are in thy hand—I had said in my alarm: I am driven far from thy sight'—indicate nothing but the case of despair and collapse suffered by the Christ, who said in those critical hours: 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death, remain here and watch with me.' 'And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.' Suffice it to read in this Psalm:

'thou hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy—thou didst hear my supplications when I cried to thee for help'—then we say with full confidence that this is a prophecy of the safety of the Christ. and of the failure of the plot against him.

Psalm 109 :

- 1 "Be not silent, O God of my praise! For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues.
They beset me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In turn for my love they accuse me, even as I make prayer for them..
- 2 Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial (stand at his right hand. Heb).
When he is tried, let him come forth guilty;
let his prayer be counted as sin !
May his days be few; may another seize his goods (his office : A. V.) !
May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow!
- 3 For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the broken—hearted to their death (that he might even slay the broken in heart : A. V.).
He loved to curse; let curses come to him ! ..
He clothed himself with cursing as his coat
may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones !
May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,
of those who speak evil against my life !

- 4 But thou, O God my Lord, deal on my behalf
for thy name's sake; because thy steadfast
love is good, deliver me !
For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken
within me .. My knees are weak through
fasting; my body has become gaunt
I am an object of scorn to my accusers..
Help me, O Lord my God !
Save me according to thy steadfast love !
;Let them know that this is thy hand;
thou, O Lord, hast done it !
- 5 Let them curse, but do thou bless !
Let my assailants be put to shame,
may thy servant be glad !
May my accusers be clothed with dishonour;
may they be wrapped in their own shame
as in a mantle !
- 6 With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord;
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.
For he stands at the right hand of the needy,
to save him from those who condemn him to death."

Peter has declared that the wicked of whom this Psalm speaks, is Judas the traitor. Luke has recorded that in Acts :

"For it is written in the book of Psalms,
'Let his habitation become desolate,
and let there be no one to live in it;'
and 'His office let another take.'" 1 : 20.

Consequently, that righteous servant praying to the Lord his God, should be the Christ.

Scholars believe that Mark 14²⁷⁻²⁹, is meant to be the fulfilment of some Old Testament passages as Ps. 109^{25 (65)}

In the preface of this Psalm (stanza 1), the Christ prays to God, so that a counter—action may be taken quickly to cause the plot of the wicked to fail.

Then the Christ curses the wicked (stanza 2) whom Peter mentions to be Judas Iscariot. Although these curses take the form of a

⁶⁴ Ref A p 404

prayer, yet stanza 6 asserts the complete answering of the Christ's power and his safety : 'With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord..

For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who condemn him.' In order that those curses (accusations) be verified, Judas should be exposed to:

- (a) A trial : 'let an accuser bring him to trial.'
- (b) The trial ends with his condemnation: 'When he is tried, let him come forth guilty.'
- (c) The penalty of his condemnation is death : 'May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.'
- (d) When he feels his end, like all sons of Adam, he will pray to God for mercy and forgiveness, but his prayer will be refused: 'let his prayer be counted as sin.'
- (e) Because 'he loved to curse; let curses come to him.. may it soak into his body like water.' This means that he should be crucified : "A hanged man is accursed by God." Deut 21 : 23.
- (f) Finally, this wicked man should be hanged with criminals : 'let Satan stand at his right hand:A.V.'

All the gospels recorded the trial of the arrested man, who was condemned to death:

"What is your judgment? They answered, 'He deserves death.'" Mt 26 : 66.

"The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and by that law he ought to die.'" Jn 19 : 7.

It should be noted that the crime of the wicked was that : 'he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and broken hearted to their death.' Or, more clearly, according to A.V: because he 'persecuted the poor and needy man that he might even slay the broken in heart.'

So the cursed and the wicked man was aiming at slaying the broken in heart, that is, the Christ. He did not slay him, nor caused him to be killed, but he was trying to do so.

Whatever the case, this Psalm asserts that God will deliver the Christ from the hand of those who want to kill him : 'For He stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who condemn him to death.'

Undoubtedly, this deliverance is to be before death.

Psalm 37 :

- 1 "The wicked plots against the righteous,
and gnashes his teeth at him;
but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that his day is coming.
- 2 The wicked draw the sword and bend their
bows, to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those who walk uprightly;
their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken..
- 3 The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks
to slay him.
The Lord will not abandon him to his power,
or let him be condemned when he is
brought to trial.
- 4 Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way,
and he will exalt you to possess the land,
you will look on the destruction of the wicked..
The salvation of the righteous is from the
Lord; he is their refuge in the time of
trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers
them; he delivers them from the wicked,
and saves them, because they take
refuge in him."

This Psalm—which Matthew alluded to in 26 : 16—is considered one which prophesies more clearly of Judas' crucifixion, after the failure of his plot against the Christ.

That wicked, Judas, thought of delivering the righteous, the Christ, to his enemies to be killed, but God laughs at him (Stanza 1), because this evil thinking person will make his day of death come faster.

Judas puts his plot in action by keeping a watch over the Christ, and 'seeks to slay him.' But all this evil will be upset against him (stanza 2), for 'his sword shall enter his own heart, and his bow shall be broken.' The sword is a weapon of killing. Under the Romans, the cross was a major weapon of killing the criminals and outlaws. The sword here therefore means the cross.

After the prediction of the failure of the plot (stanza 1), and the killing of the wicked traitor (stanza 2), we find that stanza 4 refers to all these understandings that the Christ will be saved and exalted 'to possess the land, and look on the destruction of the wicked.'

Stanza 3 says: 'The Lord will not abandon him to his power,' which means clearly the failure of seizing the Christ. But the other part of this stanza: '.. or let him be condemned when he brought to trial,' can never agree with the gospels' narratives of the trial except in one eventuality, that is, that man who was tried and condemned was in fact somebody other than the Christ. This is the only eventuality which allows the fulfilling of the prophecies of the Psalms, concerning the trial. This is because Psalm 109 prophesies the condemnation of Judas, as we have seen before, while Psalm 37 prophesies the deliverance of the Christ.

It should be noted that condemnation here means: sentence to death followed by execution. This is what the gospel says:

"So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered him, 'If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourself and judge him by your own law.' The Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.'" Jn 18 : 29-31.

Thus condemnation means : judging according to the law, followed by putting the guilty to death.

All that is said above leads to conclude that : this Psalm prophesies the failure of the plot against the Christ, the complete safety of the Christ, and the killing of Judas by the sword which was prepared for the Christ, that is, on the cross.

Psalm 69 :

1 "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.
What I did not steal must I now restore?

- 2 O God, thou knowest my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from thee.
 Let not those who hope in thee be put to shame through me,
 O Lord God of Hosts;
 let not those who seek thee be brought to dishonour through me, O God of Israel.
 For it is for thy sake that I have borne reproach that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brethren, an alien to my mother's sons.
 For zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me.
 When I humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.
- 3 But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord.
 At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of thy steadfast love answer me. With thy faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire, let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me.
 Answer me, O Lord, for thy steadfast love is good; according to thy abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in distress, make haste to answer me.
 Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free because of my enemies!
- 4 Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame and my dishonour; my foes are all known to thee. Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

- 5 Let their own table before them become a snare,
let their sacrificial feasts be a trap.
Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,
and make their loins tremble continually..
For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten,
and him whom thou hast wounded, they afflict
still more. Add to them punishment upon punish-
ment; may they have no acquittal from thee..
- 6 But I am afflicted and in pain; let thy salvation,
O God, set me on high! I will praise the
name of God with a song..
Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and
everything that moves therein.
For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities
of Judah; and his servants shall dwell there
and possess it; the children of his servants
shall inherit it, and those who love his name
shall dwell in it.”

The proper understanding of this Psalm and its uses in the New Testament depends on the understanding the following four main points:

(i) **Old and New Translations of this Psalm:**

The old translation of this Psalm (A.V.) is different from its new one,⁶⁶ in some important wordings, as seen from a simple comparison in the table below. The reader should pay attention to verse—numbering, as well as, the tenses of the verbs.

| Old Translation (A.V.) | | New Translation | |
|------------------------|---|-----------------|---|
| 4. | mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. | 5 | Those who attack me with lies are too much for my strength. How can I restore what I have never stolen? |
| 7 | Because for thy sake I have borne reproach | 8 | It is for you that I suffer taunts, |

⁶⁶ Ref. 3 : pp. 118-120

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 9 | the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. | 10 | and taunts against you fall on me. |
| 10 | When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. | 11 | When I afflict my soul with fasting they make it a taunt against me. |
| 11 | I made sackcloth also my garment, and I became a proverb to them, | 12 | When I put on sackcloth in mourning then they make me a byword |
| 21 | They gave me also goall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. | 22 | For food they gave me poison; in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink |
| 26 | For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten, and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. | 27 | for they persecute one whom you struck; they increase the pain of him you wounded. |

The disagreement of the two translations, is clear especially in VV. 5 and 22 of the new translation. Verse 21 of the old translation was quoted by the gospels' writers to support the end of the story of crucifixion, but now, according to the new translation, as in the table and also according to R.S.V., it has become clear that it is a wrong testimony.

We are now quite familiar with the fact that, from time to time, new translations of the Bible are in disagreement, sometimes in contrast with the old translation.

Suffice it to make a comparison between the King James' Version (A.V.), and the Revised Standard Version (R.S.V.), and take just one example of each Testament, as shown on the next page.

It should be noted that what is considered to be the strongest text in the Bible for the Trinity belief (I Jn 5 : 7) as is recorded in A.V., has been omitted from the R.S.V.

(ii) Testimonies of the Psalm:

This Psalm has been quoted in Jn 2 : 17; 15 : 25; 19 : 28, also in Mk 15 : 36; Mt 27 : 34, and Rom 15 : 3. These testimonies are erroneous, as shown from the following:

| VV. | A.V. | R.S.V. |
|----------------|--|--|
| I Sam 14:41 | 41. Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken : but the people escaped. | 41. Therefore Saul said, "O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. |
| I Jn 5:6-8 | 6. This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 7. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost : and these three are one. 8. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood : and these three agree in one. | 6. This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and and the blood. 7. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8. There are three witnesses the Spirit, the water and the blood; and these three agree. |

1. John says:

"But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'" 15 : 24-25.

It is known that the Old Testament is composed of the law, the prophets, and the writings which contain the Psalms as one of its

components. It is also known that the law is conventionally composed of the first five chapters, although the actual law is no more than one third of them. So the Psalms or the book of Psalms is something quite different from the law.

The mention of the 'hate without cause' has come in Ps 35 : 19, and Ps 69 : 4. So John was mistaken when he said that his quotation came from the law.

This error reminds us of what Matthew (27 : 9) had considered a prophecy from Jeremiah, while it can only be ascribed to Zechariah.

2. Scholars are agreed on the point that the quotation in Jn 15 : 25 is from Ps 69, which is another error, beside the one just previously mentioned:

Psalm 69 says : 'More in number than the hair of my head.' But the speaker here can never be the Christ of the gospels, who enjoyed great popularity, as against his enemies : the chief priests, the elders and the scribes, who were conspiring against him. This can be seen:

(a) From the beginning of his ministry:

"he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases.. and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decap'olis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan." Mt 4 : 23-25.

"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages.. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.'" Mt 9 : 35-37.

b) "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did.. Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down'.. so the men sat down, in number about five thousand.. Perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.'" Jn6 : 1-15.

- (c) In his last entry to Jerusalem.

“Many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ Mk 11 : 8-10.

- (d) This great popularity of the Christ compelled the Jewish priesthood to plot against him ‘by stealth.’

“The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him; for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people.’ Mk 14 : 1-2.

All the above mentioned leads to conclude that what John had written about those who were more in number than the hair of the head’ and hate the Christ without cause, is very far from the truth, and consequently this testimony, has nothing to do with the Christ.

3. Mark said that there were two attempts to make the crucified man have a drink. The first was when “they brought him to the place called Gol’gotha. And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it.” Mk 15 : 22-23. And the second was after he gave the cry of despair on the cross, then “one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.” Mk 15 : 36.

Matthew has copied Mark but he differed from him in the thing that was offered him to drink. He said : “And when they came to a place called Gol’gotha, they offered him wine (Vineger:A.V.) to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.” Mt 28 : 33-34.

That drink in Mark : ‘Wine mingled with myrrh,’ has been replaced in Matthew, according to A.V., by : ‘Vinegar mingled with gall,’ which is something different, in spite of the attempt of R.S.V., for correction by saying : ‘wine mingled with gall.’

John knew nothing about the first attempt, so he spoke only of the second attempt, and said : “After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus has received the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished.’”—19 : 28-30.

Although John agrees with both Mark and Matthew that the crucified man had the drink in the second attempt, yet he differed from them in the detail as to who offered the drink. Both Mark and Matthew said that he was a single person, while John spoke of the plural.

Luke spoke only of the vinegar offered by the soldiers. He said : "The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 23 : 36.

There is confusion in the story of the drink which the crucified man had drunk.

When we consider what we have called a new translation of Psalm 69, we find that V. 22 which agrees with its equivalent V. 21 of R.S.V., says : 'For food they gave me poison; in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.' This wording forbids any attempt of taking the meaning of this Psalm as literally true, for as soon as a man takes poison, he dies. So if Psalm 69 is to be considered a prophecy of killing a man on the cross, his death - according to the Psalm—should be due to poisoning and not because of putting him on the cross.

All that can be extracted from such sayings about the food and drink of that man is no more than an indication of the hard suffering to which both the righteous and the wicked can be exposed.

(iii) The Identity of the Sufferer:

We can easily identify the character and personal symptoms of the sufferer of Psalm 69 as follows:

(a) The sufferer, in this Psalm, begins with praying to God (stanza 1) asking for deliverance from a severe trial which sweeps over him like flood, the waters have come up to his neck, he is about to sink, and he is full of despair.

He confesses in stanza 2 that he is a wrongdoer and God knows well his folly, which made him ashamed and dishonour for those 'who hope in the Lord of hosts,' that is, the people of Israel.

All men know that the Christ can never be a man of follies and a wrongdoer.

He describes himself in the gospel of John : as the best Messenger of God that ever came to Israel : "All who came

before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them.. I am the good shepherd.” 10 : 8-11.

And in a controversy between the Jewish priesthood and the man blind from birth, and whose sight was restored by the Christ, he said to them : “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him.” 9 : 31.

Finally, Peter declared the innocence of the Christ from any sort of sin:

“He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.” 1 Pet 2 : 22.

Consequently there is absolutely no ground to attribute any sins and follies to the Christ, in order to identify him with that sinner sufferer of Psalm 69.

- (b) This is an elementary fact from which we can never escape. It is to be noticed that that foolish sufferer was hoping to be answered, only ‘at an acceptable time, in the abundance of God’s mercy.’

The justice of God is available at all times, in anger as well as in contentment and is everlasting; but the mercy of God and his steadfast love is available in contentment. Therefore that foolish sufferer does not ask God to treat him with justice. He just mentions some of his past good deeds when : ‘his zeal for the house of the Lord, the Temple, consumed him, and many insults fell on him. He humbled himself with fasting and made sackcloth his clothing.’ Judas Iscariot was one of the apostles who shared the troubles and reproaches of the Christ’s ministry, except during the last two days. At the beginning of his ministry the Christ said to Judas and his colleagues : “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil.” Lk 6 : 22.

- (c) There cannot be any comparison between that sinner sufferer who has nothing to hope for except the mercy of God, and the righteous sufferer, the Christ, who is fully confident that the justice of God will deliver him.

He says:

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.. For thou

hast maintained my just cause, thou hast sat on the throne giving righteous judgment.. thou has destroyed the wicked.. The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands." Ps 9.

"He reached from on high, he took me.. He brought me forth into a broad place; he delivered me because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." Ps. 18.

There is full agreement that the righteous sufferer of Psalms 9 and 18, is the Christ, who pleads and begs for the justice of God.

(d) In time of Pain and trouble, men, whether righteous or wicked, curse their enemies and those who do not care to help them. Even Christ has cursed a powerless fig tree, when he found it fruitless while he was hungry : 'He said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!, And the fig tree withered at once.'" Mk 21 : 19

It is natural then that the sinner sufferer curses his enemies and nonsympathizers, as stanza 5 says.

(e) We have seen, from the introduction to the study of the Psalms that they were classified and combined differently. For example, the two Psalms 9 and 113 of the Greek Version are composed of combining Psalms : 9,10 and 114,115 of the Hebrew, successively.

If we consider that the last stanza, No.6, was a part of the original Psalm, and was not combined to it from here or there, it means nothing except a remnant of hope in help and deliverance. In addition it is a classical ending of the Psalms which are generally praise of the Lord, and thank-offerings to Him. One of the Psalms, No.117, is nothing except this. It says : "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love towards us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!"

iv. Conclusion:

(a) The imploring man in Psalm 69 is a foolish sinner who has committed a great folly which put him and his people to shame and dishonour. He can never be the Christ who 'committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips,' the

righteous, the good shepherd, the wise man, 'all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,' and who always muted the sophisticated Jewish priesthood.

- (b) The writers of the gospels have used this Psalm in colouring the incidents of crucifixion as : mocking the crucified man, reviling him, offering vinegar for drinking, apathy of the bystanders, etc., are all the elements mentioned in it. This means that the crucified man was that foolish sinner, who could never be the wise Christ.

If we consider what the new translation of the Psalm says about giving poison to that sufferer we can safely reject all attempts to apply this Psalm literally to the crucified person as has been said of the vinegar drinking as fulfilment of the scripture (Jn 19 : 28), because his death should have been due to poisoning and not by being killed on the cross.

- (c) Judas Iscariot was one of the Christ's disciples and apostles. He enjoyed his full confidence as he made him the treasurer of that small band (Jn 13 : 29), till the last supper when the Christ "had dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel Satan entered into him." Jn 13 : 26-27.

When Judas had betrayed his Teacher, he committed the sin of his age and the folly of all ages. Other Psalms speak of him as from the lips of Christ:

"Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me." Ps 41 : 9.

"But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; within God's house we walked in fellowship." Ps. 55 : 13-14.

That imploring man confesses his folly and sin, then prays to God for his deliverance only due to His mery and abundance of steadfast love and in remembrance of his former activity in the ministry of which he says : "For it is for thy sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.. For zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me.." All these actions are spoken of in the past tense. They show that the speaker should be one of the Christ's disciples who shared with him the ministry with all its troubles. Surely he is Judas the traitor, from whose lips this Psalm says : "What I did

not steal must I now restore?"

Judas could not actually steal the Christ. According to his foolish thinking, he wonders how is he asked to restore an unreal theft or be punished for its commitments! Judas was plotting with the Jewish priesthood against the Christ. He actually guided the evilpower to the garden to arrest his Master, but there wonderful deeds took place, as one of the Psalms says : "When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before thee." Ps 9 : 3

This is what the gospel of John said : "When Jesus said to them 'I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground.'"

The deliverance of the Christ in that despairing moments was wonderful, as Ps 31 says : "Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as in a besieged city.

I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from thy sight.' But thou didst hear my supplications, when I cried to thee for help."

Judas was actually smitten by the 'hand of the Lord,' and compelled to restore the Christ whom he tried to steal, but could not.

Psalm 91 :

- 1 "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.' For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler..
2. A thousand may fall at your side ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked..
- 3 Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent..
For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and adder, the young lion and serpent you will trample under foot.

- 4 **Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name when he calls me I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation”**

It is agreed that this Psalm speaks of the Christ and predicts the forthcoming incidents of his life. It was that ‘written’ thing which the Christ referred to during his temptation by the devil :

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.. Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
 ‘He will give his angels charge of you,’
 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,’
 lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Mt 4 : 1-6.

Indeed, this Psalm which we have already touched, is quite clear. From stanza 4, we can clearly judge that it is a prophecy about the delivered Christ and not the crucified Christ.

This Psalm begins (stanza 1), and ends (stanza 4) with asserting the deliverance of the righteous, the Christ, who made the Lord his refuge, and in his God he placed his trust. We have seen that the Jewish priesthood was seeking ‘to arrest him by stealth and kill him.’ This ‘arrest by stealth’ is what the Psalms spoke of as:

Plot and Conspiracy : “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed.” Ps 2 : 1-2.

“let them fall by their own counsels.” Ps 5 : 10.

Pit and Net : “He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made.” Ps 7 : 15.

“The nations have sunk in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid has their own foot been caught.” Ps 9 : 15.

Theft and Taking Away Operation:

“What I did not steal must I now restore?”

“Then I restored that which I took not away : A.V.) Ps 69 : 4

Stanza 1 shows that the deliverance from that plot is possible only by ‘dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, for He will cover him with his pinions, and under his wings he will find refuge.’

When the plot is put into action, the soldiers of the evilpower are scatterd : 'A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand.' Those 'thousand' and 'ten thousand' are units of the Israelite military organisation (Num 1 : 1-16, A.V.; I Sam 18 : 7).

According to the prophecy In the Psalm, that power fails to seize the Christ : 'but it will not come near you,' for at that critical moment, God delivers 'his anointed,' the Christ, who 'will look with his eyes and see the recompense of the wicked,' Judas, the betrayer, who is led to death by crucifixion, instead of his Master. "The Lord.. has executed judgment : the wicked is snared in the works of his own hands." Ps 9 : 16, A.V.

Stanza 3 and 4 show that the deliverance of the Christ is a task given to the angels of God who will 'bear him up on their hands.' The gospels say that the angels of God had worked with the Christ since the beginning of his ministry:

"The angels ministered to him." Mk 1 : 13.

"And he said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.'" Jn 1 : 15.

So what Psalm 91 says of the angels of God carrying the Christ upon their hands, is the narration of a really happening act and not a simile. The chains of the plot were about to encompass the Christ completely; then he felt terror and despair and spoke to himself : "I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from thy sight.'" He wondered in a remnant hope if heaven could supply him with an abnormal means for escape : "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." Ps 55 : 6. The Christ had hoped to get rid of his troubles by flying like a dove, and that was fulfilled, for the remainder of his soliloquy is the prayer : "But thou didst hear my supplications."

The last stanza of this Psalm says : 'I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue (deliver : A.V.) him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him.'

In conclusion we can say that the crucified man crying in despair on the cross whose God has forsaken him, can never be the delivered and honoured Christ of the Psalm whom God made to 'look with his eyes and see the recompense of the wicked, just after the angels had borne him up on their hands. It is Judas the traitor who was dishonoured and crucified.

Psalm 118 :

1 "O Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! ..

2 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.

While the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side to help me, I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

3 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man.. All nations surrounded me, in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side, in the name of the Lord I cut them off!

They surrounded me like bees, they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off !

4 I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.

5 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous, The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, the right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!

6 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds, of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me sorely, but he has not given me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord..

I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation.

7 The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Blessed be he who enters, in the name of the Lord! ..

Thou art my God and I will give thanks to thee, O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever !"

There is agreement that this Psalm is a prophecy about the incidents of that terrible day known as the 'day of trouble' in the life of the Christ. It has been cited by the Christ in his controversy with the Jewish priesthood, as Matthew said : "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it was marvellous in our eyes?'

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it." 21 : 42-43.

The writers of the new Testament also cited this Psalm in different situations, as : Mk 11 : 9, 12 : 10; Mt 23 : 39; Lk 13 : 35; Jn 10 : 24; Acts 4 : 11; 1 Pet 2 : 7.

The Psalm begins with giving thanks to the Lord (stanza 1), then the righteous sufferer, the Christ, speaks of the day of trouble when he prayed to God for his safety, and He answered him (stanza 3).

On that day, the Jewish priesthood and the Roman soldiers, guided by Judas all 'surrounded him on every side,' but 'they blazed like a fire of thorn.' In those critical moments, the Christ prayed so that the cup of death might pass from him. 'And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground;

This Psalm predicts his safety : 'The Lord answered me and set me free.' Stanza 1, which mentions this, also asserts another important thing when it has Christ saying : 'I shall look in triumph on those who hate me,' or according to A.V. : ' therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me.'

The Christ will see the traitor captured on the failure of his plot, and the dagger sinking in his own heart : "The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not abandon him to his power.. Wait for the Lord.. you will look on the destruction of the wicked." Ps 37 : 32-34.

That is why the Christ in this Psalm (stanza 4) says to his conquered enemy : 'I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me,' or according to A.V. : 'Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall : but the Lord helped me.' The Christ had not fallen, but it was Judas who had fallen unexpectedly.

Stanza 6 predicts the complete safety of the Christ and says : 'I shall not die, but I shall live.. The Lord has not given me over to death.'

Indeed, this verse is quite a convincing proof of passing the cup of death from the Christ.

CONCLUSION FROM THE PSALMS

We have studied eleven Psalms : 9, 16, 20, 21, 22, 31, 37, 69, 91, 109, 118, in addition to Pss. 34 and 41 which have been treated in a previous section. We have touched other Psalm as well viz. 2, 4, 5, 7, 30, 35, and 55.

To sum up the elements of the prophecies of the Psalms, as regards the Christ, we have:

1. The chiefs (of the Jewish priesthood) conspire against the Christ to kill him, and get rid of him:

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.’ 2 : 2-3.

“They track me down; now they surround me; they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.” 17 : 11

“I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side! as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.” 31 : 13.

2. The conspirators use an agent, one of the Christ’s disciples, that wicked betrayer:

“Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” 41 : 9.

“It is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; within God’s house we walked in fellowship.” 55 : 12-14.

3. When the Christ feels the approaching danger, he is terrified and his soul becomes very sorrowful even unto death. He finds no refuge except in God, to whom he cries earnestly praying for deliverance and safety:

“Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. And I say, ‘O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yea, I would wander afar.’ 55 : 5-7.

“O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is sorely troubled. But thou, O Lord—how long? Turn, O Lord, save

my life; deliver me for the sake of thy steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" 6 : 2-5.

"Be gracious to me, O Lord! Behold what I suffer from those who hate me. O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death." 9 : 13.

"Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him;' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken." 13 : 3-4.

"Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire.. Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required." 40 : 6.

"Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me.. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries." 27 : 7-12.

"Vindicate me, O Lord, My God, according to thy righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me! Let them not say to themselves, 'Aha, we have our heart's desire!' Let them not say, 'We have swallowed him up.'" 35 : 24-25.

"What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be thou my helper!" 30 : 9-10.

4. Then, the Christ curses his betrayer disciple:

"Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another sieze his goods (office)! May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow." 109 : 6-9.

"Arise, O Lord! confront them, overthrow them! Deliver my life from the wicked by thy sword." 17 : 13.

"Destroy their plans. O Lord, confuse their tongues, for I see violence and strife in the city.. But thou O God, wilt cast them down into the lowest pit; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in thee." 55 :9, 23.

5. God answers the Christ and delivers him, as the plot is to fail completely:

"The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; thou dost not give him up to the will of his enemies." 41 : 1-2.

"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; he

frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever." 33 : 10-11.

"When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before thee. For thou hast maintained my just cause." 9 : 3-4.

"Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call. This I know that God is for me.

My vows to thee I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life." 56 : 9-13.

"Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand." 20 : 6.

"The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath.. If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed." 21 : 9-11.

"Out of my distress I called on the Lord : the Lord answered me and set me free.. I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me sorely over but he has not given me over to death." 118 : 5, 118.

"He asked life of thee, thou gavest it to him." 21 : 4.

6. And God curses that traitor who drinks the very cup of death which, he took part in preparing for his Master:

"He has prepared his deadly weapons (he hath also prepared for him the instrument of death : A.V.).. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own pate his violence descends." 7 : 13-16.

"You will look on the destruction of the wicked." 37 : 34.

"Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken." 37 : 15.

7. Wonderful, indeed is the means of Christ's safety, for God 'sets him high in a broad place where he will only look with his eyes and see the recompense of the wicked':

"For He will give His angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up." 91 : 11.

"I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me." 57 : 2-3.

“For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of His tent, He will set me high upon a rock.” 27 : 5.

“Thou hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a broad place.. Blessed be the Lord, for he has wonderously shown his steadfast love to me, when I was beset as in a besieged city.” 31 : 8, 21.

All these seven prophecies of the Psalms, when brought together, read as follows:

The chiefs (of the Jewish priesthood) conspire against the Christ, to kill him and get rid of him—The conspirators use an agent, one of the Christ’s disciples, that wicked betrayer. When the Christ feels the approaching danger, he is terrified and his soul becomes very sorrowful even unto death. He finds no refuge except in God, to whom he cries earnestly praying for deliverance and safety—Then the Christ curses his betrayer disciple—God answers the Christ and delivers him, as the plot is to fail completely—And God curses that traitor who drinks the very cup of death which he took part in preparing for his Master.

Then God ‘sets the Christ high in a broad place where he will only look with his eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.’

DISAGREEMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANS AS REGARDS CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION

We may be excused for reminding again and again, that the oldest Christian writings, which became canonical after decades of years, were the letters of Paul which he began to write no less than 20 years after Christ's departure. This was followed by Mark who wrote his gospel no less than 35 years after Christ's departure.

From canonical Christian books and others which although uncanonical, yet were used in Christian teaching and considered at least of special importance, we can show the disagreement of early Christians as regards what is said about the Christ's crucifixion. They differed in their belief in Christ's crucifixion. first : as a historical event, and secondly : as a theory of salvation and ransom for many.'

These disagreement still have echoes in the Christian writings even to this day.

Disagreement on Crucifixion as an Incident :

"And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passer—by, Simon of Cyrene who was coming in from the country, the father, of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.. And it was the third hour when they crucified him." Mk 15 : 20-25.

Nineham opines:

"The Church for which St. Mark wrote obviously knew these two (Alexander and Rufus) so well that it needed no further account of them; very likely they were Church members. This seems to guarantee the story of Simon's having carried the cross.. .

The reason for its omission in John may be that by the time the fourth Gospel was written (A.D. 100 - 125) the claim was already being made in gnostic circles which became so prominent later that Simon changed places with Jesus and was crucified in his stead."⁶⁸

Matthew says:

"As they went out they came upon a man of Cyrene Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross.. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them.. then

⁶⁸ Ref. 7 : pp. 440

they sat down and kept watch over him there.. Next day.. the chief priests and Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can. So they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.'" 27 : 32-66.

John Fenton remarks:

"Mark's next sentence ('And they crucified him, and divided his garments...') is : 'And it was the third hour, when they crucified him,' but Matthew changes this to 'then they sat down and kept watch over him there.' Notice also the addition of the words 'keeping watch over' Jesus in V. 54. The reason why Matthew adds these references to the guarding of Jesus during the crucifixion and after (see VV. 62-66, 28⁴. 11-13) may be that there were people who said that Jesus had been removed from the cross before he was dead; one of the gnostic sects of the second century said that Simon of Cyrene was crucified instead of Jesus. Matthew may be countering these suggestions."⁶⁸

This shows that, after the temptation of the crucifixion till the gospels have been written, there were some early Christians who believed that the Christ was not crucified, but somebody else was crucified. There was another sect who believed that the Christ was not dead on the cross, but he came down alive.

"It was reserved for the Rationalist Venturi at the beginning of the nineteenth century to advance the curious thesis that Jesus only swooned and recovered later in the cool of the rock - hewn grave."⁷⁰

No doubt that the strength of those sects whose beliefs were spread was the major cause for the writers of the gospels to avoid ignoring them.

⁶⁸ Ref. 6 : p. 422

⁷⁰ Ref. 12 : p. 64

Disappointment on Crucifixion as a theory of Salvation:

The theory of pouring out Christ's blood on the cross as a necessity for salvation was the only gospel adopted by Paul. He wandered in the Mediterranean Roman World preaching this doctrine. But he found general resistance and complete refusal in some countries. He said in his letters:

"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me."
2 Tim 1 : 15

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." Gal 1 : 6-7.

Harnack draws our attention to the fact that some considerable Christian writings are free from any reference to crucifixion. He says:

"There is no where any mention of saving work of Christ in the whole Didache—nay, even the Kerygma about him is not taken notice of. The extensive writing of Hermas shews that this is not an accident. There is absolutely no mention here of the birth, death, resurrection, etc.; of Jesus, although the author in Sim. V. had an occasion for mentioning them. He describes the work of Jesus as:

1. Preserving the people whom God had chosen,
2. Purifying the people from sin,
3. Pointing out the path of life and promulgating the Divine law."⁷¹

The book entitled the Shepherd of Hermas "was composed by Hermas, brother to Pius, bishop of Rome; and because the Angel who bears the principal part in it, is represented in the form and habit of a shepherd. Irenaeus quotes it under the very name of Scripture. Origen thought it a most useful writing and that it was divinely inspired; Eusebius says, that, though it was not esteemed canonical, it was read publicly in the Churches, which is corroborated by Jerome; and Athanasius cites it, calls it a most useful work, and observes, that though it was not strictly canonical, the Fathers appointed it to be read for direction and confirmation in faith and piety."⁷²

⁷¹ Ref. 13 : Vol 1, p. 281

⁷² Ref. 2 : p. 197.

The Book of Harnack, referred to by Harnack, is his third book known as : **Similitudes**. In this book the Angel teaches him saying:

“The true fast is this : Do nothing wickedly in thy life, but serve God with a pure mind; and keep his commandments and walk accordig to his precepts, nor suffer any wicked desire to enter into the mind. But trust in the Lord, that if thou dost these things, and fearest him and abstaineth from every evil work, thou shalt live unto God. If thou shalt do this, thou shalt perfect a great fast, and an acceptable one unto the Lord.” 5 : 5-7.

One of the significant cases of discarding the crucifixion and all that it amounts to in some important Christian writings, is the case of ‘The letter of James one of the canonical New Testament books. It discards the crucifixion as a necessity for salvation and all talks about the resurrection of the risen Lord and his appearance to some men. This letter of James reports clearly that the true religion is : belief in the only God, accompanied by good deeds, as we shall see later on.

The True Salvation Has Nothing to do With Crucifixion:

Apart from all that can be said about crucifixion and killing the Christ ‘as ransom for many,’ the canonical books of the Bible assert the fact that the true salvation has nothing to do with the crucifixion. This is evident from the following:

1. While the Christ was walking, “One came up to him saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments? He said to him, ‘Which?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother and you love your neighbour as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘All these I have observed; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Mt 19 : 16-21

It must be mentioned that this R.S.V. text is a deviation from the A.V. text, which remained for about 2000 years (V. 17) one of the proofs used by Unitarians and other Christian sects and individuals who observe some sort of monotheism.

“According to A.V., we have : ‘And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17. And he said unto him, ‘Why callest thou me good?’ There is none good but one, that is, God : but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’” 19 : 16-17.

2. On the Day of Judgment, true salvation is achieved by good deeds, and not by belief in crucifixion and its related theories.

“The king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?..

And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food.. Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty.. and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’” 25 : 34-46.

The true standard for evaluating all men, about from the crucifixion and all it stands for, has been settled by God, Lord of all:

“The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” Ezek 18 : 20.

3. James, in his letter, reports that the judgment which fixes the eternal destination is only dependant upon belief in the only God, accompanied by good deeds, and nothing else.

“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son?.. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” 2 : 19-24.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this : to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” 1 : 27.

Products of Paul's Theory of Crucifixion:

Paul had determined to know nothing of Christianity except the crucified Christ. There appeared, in the second century, one of his disciples called Marcion. He had more than demonic thoughts, when he believed that the God of Jews who gave the law to Moses, and created the world was an evil god! He had gone astray in the end, when he spoke of a judgment between God and the Christ.

“Jesus came down to the Lord of creatures in the form his Godhead, and entered into judgment with him on account of his death... And Jesus said to him : ‘Judgment is berwen me and thee, let no one be judge but thine own laws... hast thou not written in thy law, that he who killeth shall die? And he answered, ‘I have so written’... Jesus said to him, ‘Deliver thyself therefore into my hands’... The creator of the world said, ‘Because I have slain thee I give thee a compensation, all those who shall believe on thee, that thou mayest do with them what thou pleasest.’ Then Jesus left him and carried away Paul, and shewed him the price, and sent him to preach that we are bought with this price, and that all who believe in Jesus are sold by this just god to the good one .”⁷³

In fact such mad thinking and belief that shame all human beings needs no comment.

Results from the Case of the Crucifixion

We have studied some topics connected with the case of crucifixion and obtained definite results at the end of each topic. Summing up these results, we have:

1. The narratives of the four gospels disagreed as regards the incidents of crucifixion:

⁷³ Ref 13 : Vol. 1, pp 272-279

They disagreed, among themselves, about the preliminary incidents, about the anointment of Christ with ointment and betrayal of Judas. They also disagreed about the last supper, its preparation and timing, and about the incidents of the last night. But they agreed on one point, that is, at the climax of the Christ's sorrowfulness 'all the disciples forsook him and fled.'

There was disagreement among them about the trials, their number, time, and place Peter's denial; and the crucifixion operation with all its details. The most significant disagreement was that of the day of crucifixion : according to one, Thursday; according to others, Friday.

-They disagreed, about the burial story as well. The case of crucifixion, when submitted in this manner to an impartial judge in a Court of law will be dismissed off due to the various disagreements in the testimony of the witnesses, that is, the gospel writers.

2. The stories about the end of Judas also show their disagreements, the only agreement was that he disappeared in vague circumstances, due to doubtful causes. What is said about the end of Judas reminds us of the sort of stories that are related about the end of Pilate.
3. In all circumstances, The Christ was resisting all attempts to kill him. Many times he had said to the Jews : 'Why do you seek to kill me?' And in the garden, 'he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them : My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death. And going a little further he fell on his face and prayed : if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' At the trial the arrested man said to his questioner : 'If I tell you (whether I am the Christ or not), you will not believe; and if I ask you, you, will not answer me (nor let me go : A.V.).

Even at the last breath, the crucified man was crying in despair : 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

4. It is pertinent to note the prophecies of the Christ that he will be saved from killing, his saying to the Jews : 'You will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come.'
5. As regards 'the prophecies of the Psalms that the Christ will be saved from killing,' the facts confirmed the

deliverance of the Christ : 'the Lord protects him and keeps him alive.. does not give him up to the will of his enemies.' Also : 'I shall not die, but I shall live.. he has not given me over to death.'

But it was Judas the traitor who 'makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made.' 'Their sword shall enter their own heart.' That is because the Lord 'has executed judgements : the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.'

6. The early Christians disagreed as regards the crucifixion of Christ : as an incident, and as a theory, given currency by Paul who taught its necessity for salvation.

It has become clear that what is written about the crucifixion of Christ in the gospels and other Christian writings is one of their major problems . Its solution lies for the reader in properly understanding and evaluating the evidence and shedding away all prejudices irrespective of the inherited belief.

Either a new understanding, or a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, repeated by the Christ to those rigid Jews:

“With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says : ‘You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this peoples’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.’” Mt 13 : 14-15.

Chapter 4

The Case of Resurrection and Appearance

THE RESURRECTION

The gospels say that the Christ was crucified on Thursday (according to John), or on Friday (according to Mark, Matthew and Luke). After he had died on the cross, he was buried in a tomb. In the early hours of Sunday, some women discovered that the tomb, which they believed was his, was empty.

This was the nucleus of the resurrection narratives, which began to interfere with other narratives dealing with his appearance to some of his followers, heading them, of course, was "Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons"—Mk 16 : 9.

The narratives of the Christ's resurrection and his appearance after death, began to spread too slowly among the first Christian group. That was due to the denial of the disciples headed by Peter, and their doubt in such narratives. And hence, the declaration of the resurrection was delayed for seven weeks.

If this is the overall picture of the resurrection as recorded in the gospels, it should be always remembered that:

"The earliest evidence for the resurrection is provided, not by the Gospels, but the Epistles of Paul and particularly by I Cor. 15, written at least ten years before the earliest Gospel. In this chapter Paul quotes a tradition which he had received from those who were Christians before him, perhaps at the time of his conversion, twenty years or more earlier."¹

We have seen that the crucifixion is a major problem of the gospels, consequently all that is built upon it, viz. the resurrection and the appearance, is another major problem, added to many other problems, all of which overburden the gospels.

We will discuss this problem thoroughly.

¹ Ref. 8:p. 255

The Women at the Tomb:

“And when the sabbath was past, Mary Mag’dalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salo’me, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?’ And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’ And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Mk 16 : 1-8.

Nineham comments:

“The motive suggested for this visit, however, is surprising. Quite apart from the question raised in V. 3 (‘Who will roll away the stone?’), it is hard to credit the women with the intention of going to anoint a body a day and two nights after death, and most commentators echo the comment of Montefiore : ‘The cause assigned for their visit to the grave is very unlikely’.. According to St. Mark, the body of Jesus was infact never anointed after death (contrast John 19⁴⁰).. many readers will probably sympathize with the conclusion of Vincent Taylor that : ‘it is probable that Mark’s description is imaginative; he picturesquely describes what he believes happened.’”²

Matthew alone said that the Jews asked the Roman governer to make secure the sepulchre, and he answered them saying:

“You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it secure as you can.’ So they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.”

After that he spoke of the visit of the women to the sepulchre in a different way, saying:

² Ref 6 p 443-4

“Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Mag’dalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you.’ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” 28 : 1-8.

John Fenton remarks:

“The appearance of Jesus to the women in Matthew 28^{9f} has been added by Matthew. Similarly, the earthquake, the angel descending from heaven and rolling back the stone, and the fear of the guards (VV. 2-4) are all Matthean additions, for which Matthew has ‘made room’ by omitting Mark 16³⁻⁵. In Mark, the women do not obey the message, but in Matthew they do.”³

Luke says:

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the man said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee.. And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Mag’dalene and Jo-an’na and Mary the mother of James and other women with them who told this to the apostles.” 24 : 1-10.

³ Ref. 7 : p 449-50

George Caird's comments:

"Luke's story of the empty tomb runs parallel to Mark's, but differs from it at four points. Where Mark mentions one young man at the tomb, Luke has two.. According to Mark 16⁷, the women were told : 'go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.' In place of this Luke has a reference to teaching given formerly in Galilee; for according to Luke's special source the resurrection appearances occurred not in Galilee but only in and around Jerusalem. Again, according to Mark, the women, having been entrusted with a message, failed to deliver it because they were afraid; but Luke tells us that they made a full report to the other disciples of what they had seen and heard. Finally, the list of names is different, Luke giving Joanna in the place of Mark's Salome."⁴

But John's story of the resurrection is in disagreement with the other three.

He says:

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb : he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciples, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary Stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had laid, one at the head and one at

⁴ Ref. 9 : p. 256

the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' 20 : 1-13.

The Gospels' Disagreements about the Women's Visit:

These disagreements are easily observed by the reader, in addition to the following:

1. Mark says that the visitors were three women, while Matthew mentioned only two. And Luke speaks of 'women who had come with him from Galilee' (23 : 55), 'and certain others with them' (A.V. 24 : 1).

But John makes Mary Mag'dalene the only person who visited the grave and who goes out to tell the two disciples.

So Mary Mag'dalene 'from whom the Christ had cast out seven demons,' is the principal origin of all that is said about the resurrection and the risen Christ from the dead.

2. At the tomb, the visiting women saw : 'a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe' (Mark); or 'an angel of the Lord. His appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow' (Matthew); or 'two men stood by them in dazzling apparel' (Luke); or 'two angels in white, sitting one at the head and one at the feet' (John)!

Frank Morison comments on the visit of the women to the tomb, and what was mixed with this story from different sources, saying:

"Thus we can see how, as a matter of historic fact, the adventure of the women at the grave did sink into comparative oblivion beside the much vaster and more vital issues which events determined. Its memory was cherished personally by the women themselves.. In quieter and more settled time it was doubtless included in the instructions of the Church. And out of that widespread dissemination of the story throughout the Christian Churches of Europe and Asia arose all those divergent and developed accounts of which St. Luke and St. Matthew's versions are typical.

The young man at the grave, who really was a young man in the original story, became in course of time the great angel of St. Matthew, and the two mighty and dazzling celestial visitants of St. Luke. Thus, too, the rolling away of the stone, the true history of which was known only to the priests, became the subject of numerous conjectures, some saying that it rolled away of itself, others that the angels moved it."⁵

⁵ Ref 11 p 182

THE APPEARANCE

The Gospels' Narratives:

We have been accustomed to begin with the gospel of Mark, followed by with the other gospels. This is mainly due to its oldness compared to the other three gospels, besides its being the main source for Matthew and Luke. According to this custom, when we report what Mark had said about the appearance of the risen Christ from the dead, we say :

'Mark's gospel says : Nothing...!', it will astonish many.

Some readers will hurry to their Bible to make sure that this serious claim is really correct. They will however find that Mark's gospel does, speak in its last chapter, 16 : 9-20, about the appearances of the Christ to some men..! Yet our statement is correct, which will be borne out by the fact that the end of Mark's gospel, which speaks, of the appearance of the Christ (VV. 9-20) is not a work of Mark, the original writer of this gospel, but it is an addition, which was appended to it at about A.D. 180, that is, about 120 years after Mark had compiled his book.

We have mentioned this fact before, and now we add Nineham's opinion:

“Although these verses (9-20) appear in most of the extant MSS. of Mark, R.S.V. is certainly right in treating them as spurious and relegating them to the margin. The great Roman Catholic scholar Lagrange is quite clear that though 'canonically authentic' (i.e. Part of the canon of Holy Scripture), they are not authentic in a literary sense (i.e. not the work of St. Mark). The reasons for this view—in which all other scholars concur—are basically three:

- (i) Some of our best MSS. of Mark end at 16^b; other MSS. agree with them in omitting VV. 9-20, but have the alternative ending given (before).
- (ii) The great fourth-century scholars, Eusebius and Jerome, testify that the verses were wanting in all the best Greek MSS. known to them, and they are quoted only once (or possibly twice) in the whole of Christian literature down to A.D. 325.
- (iii) Most decisively of all, the style and vocabulary of the verses, which smack of the second century, are completely different from those of St. Mark.

The passage cannot be dated exactly; it had become accepted as part of Mark's Gospel by about A.D. 180."⁶

According to John Fenton:

"As far as we know, the Gospel according to Mark, as Matthew had it, ended at Mark 16⁸; so the appearance of Jesus to the women in Matthew 27^{9f} has been added by Matthew.. Mark's Gospel, as far as we know, contained no account of the appearance of the risen Lord."⁷

In spite of all that, we shall study what is written in Mark's gospel about the appearance of the Christ.

'Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Mag'dalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen." 16 : 9-14.

We have known from Matthew that the angel of the Lord said to Mary Mag'dalene and the other Mary 'go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' 'So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.'

Matthew adds:

"And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Hail!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me'.'. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

⁶ Ref. 6 : pp. 449-50

⁷ Ref. 7 : pp 449-50

And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted." 28 : 9-17.

Luke speaks of the appearance, saying:

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us.. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognising.. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other'.. And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.. And he said to them, 'O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!.. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, 'Stay with us'.. So he went to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight.. And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!'..

As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish (and of an honey comb : A.V.), and he took it and ate before them." 24 : 13-43.

John said that Mary Mag'dalene was weeping at the tomb when the two angels "said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take

him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rab-bo'ni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Mag'dalene went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord;' and she told them that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord..

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, 'Peace be with you'..

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as.. Just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.. He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some'.. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish.. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead." 20 : 13-26; 21 : 1-14.

Notes on the Gospels' Narratives:

1. Mark, Matthew and John agreed that the first appearance was to Mary Mag'dalene, who did not recognise him, and supposed him to be the gardener.. But Luke discarded this fully, and made the first appearance to 'two of them going to a village named Emma'us.'
2. The appearance to the majority of the disciples together took place only once, according to Mark, Matthew and Luke. But John recorded it three times, in different forms.

3. Both Mark and Matthew agreed that the appearance to the eleven disciples took place in Galilee. This is in contrast with the version of both Luke and John who recorded it at Jerusalem.

Disciples' Doubt in Resurrection and Appearance:

The gospels' narratives of resurrection and appearance are full of gaps and defects, which can be easily seen by just comparing similar situations in the four gospels. These defects and gaps are a sufficient ground to reject them all. Nineteen centuries ago, Mark had rejected all narratives of Christ's appearances. Moreover, all the disciples had doubted these narratives said to be spread by women led by Mary Mag'dalene.

"Now it was Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them whom told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened." Lk 24 : 10-12.

This was the condition of the disciples as gathered from the narratives of resurrection, whom the Christ had taught his doctrines, and had said to them:

"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the crowds) it has not been given." Mt 13 : 11.

These were his disciples, including John, and headed by Peter who were taught by the Christ during his whole ministry and before Mary Mag'dalene and the other women had joined the society of the disciples.

The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke record a speech of the Christ to his disciples, interrupted by their questions which he answered plainly, concerning the resurrection. The gospels say:

"And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me,

Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.” Mk 8 : 31-33; Mt 16 : 21-23; Lk 9 : 22.

This means clearly that the resurrection, is an out of question doctrine, on the same level as the prediction of his being killed, especially with respect to Peter who has been called Satan, an unforgotten name. The gospels assert that the Christ ‘said this plainly.’

We have seen earlier that the story of resurrection narrated by Mary Mag’dalene to Peter and his fellows ‘seemed to them an idle tale.’ So we have again to face an unescapable result, that is, the speech recorded by the gospels concerning the Christ’s prophecy that he will ‘be killed and after three days rise again’ is nothing but additions, subsequently appended to the gospels. This is, in fact what the gospel of John states, when it says that the teaching of resurrection was strange to the disciples’ doctrines. When Mary Mag’dalene told Peter and John of the resurrection:

“Peter then came out with the other disciple.. but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.. Then Simon Peter came, following him.. Then the other disciple.. saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples (Peter and John) went back to their homes.” Jn 20 : 3-10.

All on what the gospels agreed was the emptiness of the tomb. No eyewitness has ever seen any buried man rising from the dead. For comparison we go back to see what happened to Daniel:

“He was brought and cast into the den of lions. The King said to Daniel, ‘May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!’ And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the King sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.. Then, at break of day, the King arose and went in haste to the den of the lions. When he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out : ‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?’ Then Daniel said to the King, ‘O King, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths’ and they have not hurt me.. Then the King was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of den, so Daniel was taken up out of the den, and

no kind of hurt was found upon him.” Dan 6 : 16-23

The enemies of Daniel were the eyewitnesses to his getting out of the den of lions safely, while the disciples of the Christ, his intimate friends, doubted the narrative of resurrection. No one of the Christ’s enemy, as Harnack said, had seen him, during the period which covered his resurrection and appearance and, of course, not even after that.

The disciples doubted what Mary Mag’dalene told of the Christ’s appearance. The appended addition of Mark’s gospel says that this Mary had told his disciples. ‘But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.’ This was the case with ‘two of them, as they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

The Matthean narraitve records the disciples’ doubt about the risen Christ, for ‘when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted.’

Luke also said that the disciples ‘were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit.’

John recorded the doubt of one of the disciples, Thomas, in a manner, strictly speaking, shows that the resurrection doctrine is completely strange to his disciples.

“The other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails.. and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.’”

The classical Christianity has built the edifice of its Belief upon what is believed to be historical events, as, the crucifixion and the resurrection of the third day, in such a manner that if those events could not be proved to have taken place, the edifice of the classical belief will completely collapse.

The scholars of Christianity observe that:

“It has often been emphasized that Christianity is historical in a sense in which no other religion is, for it stands or falls by certain events which are alleged to have taken place during a particular period of forty - eight hours in Palsetine nearly two thousand years ago.”⁸

⁸ Ref. 15 : p. 58

“In what respects then is Christian belief historically vulnerable?

First, Christians are expected to hold their beliefs with such assurance that they are prepared not only to live by them but, if necessary, to die for them. But, if we look closely into the question, we have to acknowledge that no beliefs about matters of history can be proved to be certainly true : strictly speaking, they can never have more than a very high degree of probability.

Do Christians then live and die for what they must allow to be not certainly, but only probably, the case?”⁹

Those who see nothing in the virtuous and true Christianity of the Christ, like Paul, except crucifixion and resurrection have indeed, led it into a dangerous adventure, and placed it under the judgments of History, which is definitely against the narratives of crucifixion, resurrection, and appearance.

Adolf Harnack says:

“The following points are historically certain : (1) That none of Christ’s opponents saw him after his death. (2) That the disciples were convinced that they had seen him soon after his death. (3) That the succession and number of those appearances can no longer be ascertained with certainty. (4) That the disciples and Paul were conscious of having seen Christ not in the crucified earthly body, but in heavenly glory of such a body that can pass through closed doors which certainly is not an earthly body. But, as even the empty grave on the third day can by no means be regarded as a certain historical fact.. History is therefore at first unable to bring any succour to faith here.”¹⁰

Where Did the Christ Go?

Christian sources disagreed about the place where the Christ is said to have gone after the crucifixion temptation, as well as about the timing of his going to the supposed places.

Some said that after resurrection he ascended to heaven, others said that he descended first to hell, before his ascension!

Did the Christ ascend to heaven?

Luke said that:

“they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one

⁹ Ref. 15 : pp. 64-5

¹⁰ Ref. 13 : Vol. 1, pp. 85-6

on the left.. One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him.. But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" 23 : 33-43.

John said that on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that it was empty. She "stood weeping outside the tomb.. Jesus said to her, 'Mary,' she turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rab-bo'ni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 20 : 11-17.

Now, according to Luke, ascension to heaven took place on the very day of crucifixion, but according to John, it was some days after crucifixion. But Luke, indeed, has changed the date of ascension, which he had said to be on the day of crucifixion into a later date, after the appearance, as he reported at the end of his gospel : "While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven." 24 : 51. Luke said in Acts, that ascension took place no less than forty days after crucifixion:

"To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.. And when he said this, as they were looking on he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." 1 : 3-9.

Adolf Harnack says:

"The belief that Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after the resurrection, gradually made way against the older conception, according to which resurrection and ascension really coincided, and against other ideas which maintained a longer period between the two events..

Paul knows nothing of an Ascension, nor it is mentioned by Clement, Ignatius, Hermans, or Polycarp..

Resurrection and setting at the right hand of God are frequently united in the formulae (Eph.I. 20; Acts.II. 32 ff.). According to Luke XXIV. 51, and Barn.15.9, the ascension into heaven took

place on the day of the resurrection (Probably also according to Joh.XX. 17; see also the fragment of the Gosp. of Peter), and is hardly to be thought of as happening but once. (Joh.III. 13 : VI. 62; see also Rom.X. 6 f.; Eph.IV. 9f.; 1 Pet.III. 19f.)..

The statement that the Ascension took place 40 days after the Resurrection is first found in the Acts of the Apostles.”¹¹

“According to the Valentinians and Ophites, Christ ascended into heaven 18 months after resurrection., according to Pistis Sophia 11 years after the resurrection.”¹²

Did the Christ descend to Hell?!

Some Christian sources mention that after Christ’s departure, his apostles gathered together and introduced a law for the Christian belief known as the Apostle’s Creed, one of its forms is as follows:
The Apostles’ Creed

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|--|
| “Peter. | 1. | I believe in God the Father Almighty; |
| John. | 2. | Maker of heaven and earth; |
| James. | 3. | And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; |
| Andrew. | 4. | Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; |
| Philip. | 5. | Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; |
| Thomas. | 6. | He descended into Hell, the third day he rose again from the dead; |
| Bar- tholomew. | 7. | He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; |
| Jude the brother of James. | 11. | The resurrection of the body; |
| Matthias. | 12. | Life everlasting. Amen” ¹³ |

Opinions differed sharply about the truth of this creed, and many objections arose against it. But it is found in this form in the

¹¹ Ref. 13 : Vol. 1, pp 201-4

¹² Ref. 13 : Vol. 1, p 204

¹³ Ref. 2 : p 91

'book of Common Prayer of the United Church of England and Ireland,' with a small modification, which omits the names of the Apostles, and combines together each of these two verses : 1, 2 and 3, 4.

According to this so-called creed, Christ descended into Hell before resurrection!

In the gospel of Nicodemus, it is said that after descending into Hell, Christ took Adam by hand together with all the prophets and the saints, who ascended, all, from Hell "Then the Lord holding Adam by hand, delivered him to Michael the archangel; and he led him into Paradise, filled with mercy and glory; And two very ancient men met them, and were asked by the saints, Who are ye, who have not yet been with us in hell, and have had your bodies placed in Paradise?

One of them answering, said I am Enoch, who was translated by the word of God : and this man who is with me, is Elijah the Tishbite, who was translated in a fiery chariot."¹⁴

Surely, there is a strong base for the belief of Christ's descent into Hell, which was affirmed by Jerome, and as is indicated by the writings of Paul and John.

Paul speaks of the defeat of death, exactly in the same manner as Nicodemus:

"In a moment.. the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.. then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?.. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.—I Corinthians, 15 : 52-8"

"Then the King of Glory (Jesus Christ) trampling upon death, seized the prince of hell, deprived him of all his power, and took our earthly father Adam with him to his glory.—Nicodemus, 17 : 13

The writer of John's gospel was the only one who made all prophets prior to Christ 'thieves and robbers.' Hell is their abiding place. He attributed to the Christ : "All who came before me are thieves and robbers." 10 : 7.

How is that! The Christ speaks of John the baptizer, saying:

¹⁴ Ref. 2 : p. 87

“What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written : ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.’” Lk 7 : 26-28.

The Christ even confessed that John the baptizer had shunned the necessities of life and was more ascetic than himself.

He said:

“John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon;’ the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard.’” Mt 11 : 18-19.

How could it be said that the prophets go to Hell while the Christ had clearly shown, as Luke recorded, that good believers, who are inferior to prophets, go after their death directly to Paradise, while the wicked go to Hell. That rich man who “died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Laz’arus in his bosom. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Laz’arus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; For I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that you in your life time received your good things, and Laz’arus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’” Lk 16 : 22-25.

No doubt that such sayings and beliefs like:the Christ descended to Hell to deliver the former prophets and saints, is a proof of the demonic ability of some human beings who considered themselves Christians, to fabricate such myths which remind us of the fabricated myth of the death of Pilate.

It must now be quite clear that the stories of the Christ’s resurrection, appearance, and descending to Hell, are all narratives of doubtful origin, diffused in suspicious circumstances.

THE ESSENSE OF THE TRUTH

Coming to the end of this book, we feel sure that we have become acquainted with the sources of the Christian Beliefs, their formation, and how they became sacred writings. We have also gone through the gospels, as they are the most important sources, and knew their contents and problems.

All this has enabled us to see the true story of the Christ after

many clouds of imagination and superstition, and misleading fancy, surrounding it, have dispersed. Now the true dogma of Christ, and the essence of his true doctrines, can be easily elucidated.

It is commonplace to say that the Christ was docile, tractable, easy to associate with, many times he said to men : 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest in your souls.'

Many times he had attacked the affected and rigid Jewish priesthood, that stood as a stumbling block on the path leading to God.

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in."

The Christ had truly diagnosed the soul disease when he cursed those men—the priests—placing themselves between God and men, giving themselves false authorities to work as God's agents on earth!

In the Christ's Footsteps

The Christ has put the true basis for the true religion, when he said clearly, in the sermon on the mount:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." Mt 5 : 17-18.

The first of the commandments given to Moses was:

"I am the Lord your God.. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath.. you shall not bow down to them or serve them." Ex 20 : 1-5.

Truly, He is the only God, free from having any grave image or any likeness of such incarnation and forms. All such images and likenesses should be taken away from all 'houses of worship'.

On the first day when the Christ had begun his ministry, there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened it and found the place where it was written : 'The spirit of the Lord is

upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.. to set at liberty those who are oppressed.' Then he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant, and said to them : 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

The book of Isaiah of which he spoke and taught those around him, is a great monotheistic book. It teaches all men the revelation of God, that says:

"Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble : Before me no god was formed, nor shall be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour. I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?" Is 43 : 9-13.

"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.. I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no god .. a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none besides me." Is 44 : 6; 45:5-21

The majority of mankind, across the centuries, have gone astray through worshipping their created gods which they invented, in the form of natural phenomena, hidden powers, imaginary spirits, devils, prophets and saints. Even now imaginary gods are being worshipped, even by highly educated and civilized people, under glittering names and expressions, as god incarnate. God's revelation conveyed by the lips of Isaiah to all mankind, especially to such peoples is:

"To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?"! Is 40 : 18.

"To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare, me that we may be alike?.. for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." Is 46 : 5-9.

Here, one of the axioms well known to all believers and wise men, is that the true and only God never grows weary and never dies. He is 'the everlasting God,' and 'living forever'.

Surely, he who grows weary and dies can never be God.

Once a young ruler said to Jesus : 'Good Master, what good things shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' Before answering him, he had corrected his question, and consequently his belief, when he declared that it is only He, God, who has 'the sublime similitude,' and the true complete goodness. The Christ said to him : 'Why

callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God.'

After that he showed him the way to eternal life, by obeying the law of Moses. He said : 'If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' All when one of those hypocrites, agreed with him, asking : 'Which commandments is the first of all?' He answered him:

"The first is, 'Hear, O Israel : The Lord our God, the Lord is one : and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandments greater than these."

Then, that questioner had nothing except to confirm his answer saying :

'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices'.

And when he saw that he answered wisely, the Christ said to him : 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'.

This was—and still is—the only gate to the kingdom of God : 'Belief in the only God, accompanied by good deeds', and nothing else.

Before this truly great prophet went away, he had taught his disciples who is the greatest : "The Father is greater than I." Jn 14 : 28.

Also he said to them:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant (or : slave) is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." Jn 13 : 16.

"My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is not false hood." Jn 7 : 16-18.

He has taught them also that God has His own will, and he has his own will He said to them . 'I can do nothing on my own

authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Jn 5 : 30.

And like all righteous men he had tried always to make his will coincide with God’s will, as he said, while he was praying to God in the garden: “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Mt 26 : 39.

He had taught them, also, that : ‘In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true; I bear witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me.’ Jn 8 : 18.

And when he had completed his ministry on earth, he prayed to God, in the last hours, saying:

“And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Jn 17 : 3.

In other words he taught them all : ‘There is no god save God—The Christ is the apostle of God.’

Last but not the least, he had taught them all, what to call him. He said:

“You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.” Jn 13 : 13.

He preferred that they called him ‘Teacher’ before they called him ‘Lord.’ But the most preferable to him was what he had always used to designate himself ‘the Son of man,’ which is interchangeable, as Charles Dodd said¹, with ‘Servant.’ And all these titles : Teacher, Lord, and Son of man, are completely different from : god.

Not even all those who call him ‘Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, even if they were miracle—doers:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’” Mt 7 : 21-23.

Those who borrowed his blessed name to name themselves after him have greatly disagreed among themselves about his true doc-

¹ Ref. 9 : p. 92

trines. Across the centuries, they divided themselves, struggled against each other and they even dyed their hands with the blood of their brethren, unfortunately, in his name!

This was due to the fact that they have changed his monotheism into something completely strange to his belief and doctrines, i.e.: trinitarianism!

However, there is evidence that many Christians are directing themselves nowadays towards the unitarian belief, leaving trinitarianism, behind them.

The Encyclopaedia Americana says:

“Unitarianism as a theological movement began much earlier in history; indeed it antedated Trinitarianism by many decades. Christianity derived from Judaism and Judaism was strictly Unitarian. The road which led from Jerusalem to Nicea was scarcely a straight one. Fourth century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching. It therefore developed against constant Unitarian, or at least anti - Trinitarianism opposition, and it was never wholly victorious.”²

In spite of all the serious and grievous deviations from Christ's true doctrines, there began to appear in the horizon what promises to be a faithful return to the only God, who had sent him and all his servants the prophets; the only God of whom he said, and the gospel still says: ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one;’ and of whom he had said to his followers: ‘my God and your God.’ This was the doctrine of eternal life he taught and preached.

New developments for major theological changes of the classical Christianity, as some Christian scholars hope, began to take place in this last part of the twentieth century. The need for this development—as they believe — “arises from growing knowledge of Christian origins, and involves a recognition that Jesus was (as he is presented in Acts 2.22) ‘a man approved by God’ for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way expressing his significance for (them). This recognition is called for in the interests

² Ref. 16 : Vol. 27, p. 294 L

of truth .. (Their) hope is to release talk about God and about Jesus from confusion, there by freeing people to serve God in the Christian path with greater integrity.”³

And, Lastly Master! True Messenger of God!

Peace of God be upon you,-forever, with the best greetings and the greatest honour and dignity.

³ Ref. 19 : pp. xi. x.

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A Hint About the References

A list of the main references is annexed to this book where each reference has its serial number quoted when used either for direct text quotation or otherwise.

It would be useful for the reader to get acquainted with the most important of these references.

1. Reference No. 1 : THE BIBLE

The Bible text used in this book is mainly from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, except a few from the Authorised Version. There are different well-known translations of the Bible such as :

(a) Authorised Version (A.V.) :

King James I commissioned scholars to translate the Bible. It was first published in 1611, and for more than two and a half centuries no other authorised translation of the Bible into English was made.

Yet the King James Version has grave defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of Biblical studies and the discovery of many manuscripts more ancient than those upon which the King James Version was based, made it manifest that these defects were so many and so serious as to call for revision of the English translation. The task was undertaken, by the authority of the Church of England, in 1870.

(b) Revised Version (R.V.) :

In February, 1870, the Convocation of Canterbury appointed a committee to consider the subject of revision. The revision of the New Testament took over 10 years, and was presented to the Convocation on May 17, 1881. The revision of the Old Testament was finished on June 20, 1884. The revised Apocrypha did not make its appearance, until 1895.

(c) American Standard Version (A.S.V.) :

After the publication of the Revised Version, in 1885, the American Revision Committee continued to work toward a

further revision of the text, in accordance with the appendix, and other revisions appeared in 1901.

(d) **Revised Standard Version (R.S.V.) :**

Copyrighted to “insure purity of text,” the American Standard Version, was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education, representing churches in the United States and Canada. In 1937 the council authorised a new revision, and directed a committee of 32 scholars advised by a board of 50 representatives of various denominations, to prepare its revision. In 1946, the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published, and that of the whole Bible, in 1952. It was authorised by the National Council of Churches.

It should be noted that these translations of the Bible, differ widely, not only in the changes made to some key words in the Scriptures, but also due to omission, insertion, or both of some important texts. As an illustration it may be shown that in the Authorised Version, I John 5 : 7, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost : and these three are one”—which gave the strongest prop for the Trinity belief during the centuries—is now discarded from the Revised Standard Version. This trinity text (V.7) had never been in the New Testament before the thirteenth century.

2. **Reference No. 4 :**

F.C. Grant : THE GOSPELS; Their Origin and Their Growth.

Dr. Frederic Clifton Grant was a professor of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

3. **Reference No. 6 :**

D.E. Nineham : SAINT MARK

Denis Eric Nineham worked at London University as Professor of Biblical and Historical Theology, at King’s College, after which he became Professor of Divinity in the same university. He represented the London University constituency in the Canterbury Convocation, and was also a member of the Joint Management Committee of the New English Bible. Professor Nineham was the General Editor of the Pelican Gospel Commentaries.

4. Reference No. 7 :

J.C. Fenton : SAINT MATTHEW

John Fenton was vicar of Wentworth in Yorkshire, after that he was appointed Principal of Lichfield Theological College.

5. Reference No. 8 :

G.B. Caird : SAINT LUKE

Dr. George Bradford Caird was the chairman of New Testament at McGill University, Montreal. Then he was also Principal of the United Theological College. He was appointed Senior Tutor at Mansfield College, Oxford and was President of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies.

6. Reference No. 9 :

C.H. Dodd : ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.

Charles Harold Dodd was appointed to the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University. He became General Director of the project new translation of the Bible. He was a fellow of the British Academy and a honorary Fellow of University College, Oxford and of Jesus College, Cambridge. This book represents a course of Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey.

7. Reference No. 10 :

C H. Dodd : THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

This book is based on a course of Shaffer Lectures given in the Divinity School, Yale University.

8. Reference No. 13 :

Adolf Harnack : HISTORY OF DOGMA

Dr. Harnack is considered one of the greatest Church historians. This book—in seven volumes—locates the origins and traces the development of the authoritative Christian doctrinal system from its beginnings down to the Reformation.

9. Reference No. 15 :

OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF

This book represents a course delivered in Cambridge by four members of the Faculty of Divinity in the University. The authors are : D.M. Mackinnon, H.A. Williams, A.R. Vidler, and J.S. Bezzant.

The preface of the book says :

“This is an age when the foundations of Christian belief are being called in question. The case against Christianity cannot be met by mere repetition of old arguments nor by slick ‘apologetic.’



ABOUT THE AUTHOR :

1. Major General Ahmed Abdel-Wahab Ali.
2. Born in Egypt June 1930.
Graduated from Faculty of Engineering, Telecommunications, Cairo University, 1954.
3. Interested in comparative religions since his teens ; realised very early that inherited religious belief without conviction, backed by proof, was mere sentimentalism.
4. It can be said that this book is the result of more than 20 years of studies of comparative religions, religious controversies, arguments, et al.
5. His other books are :
 - (i) THE REVELATION AND THE ANGELS
in : Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
 - (ii) THE PROPHETHOOD AND THE PROPHETS
in : Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
 - (iii) BASICS OF MODERN ATOMIC SCIENCES
IN THE ISLAMIC HERITAGES
 - (iv) THE UNITARIANS ; A Christian Sect
 - (v) THE REAL STATE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS
ACROSS CENTURIES

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