THE MODERN SCHOLAR

GREAT PROFESSORS TEACHING YOU!

THE QUEST:

THE HISTORIANS' SEARCH FOR JESUS AND MUHAMMAD

COURSE GUIDE

Professor F.E. Peters
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

The Quest:
The Historians' Search for Jesus and Muhammad

Professor F.E. Peters
New York University

The Quest:
The Historians' Search
for Jesus and Muhammad

Professor F.E. Peters

Executive Editor

Donna F. Carnahan

RECORDING

Producer - David Markowitz

Director - Matthew Cavnar

COURSE GUIDE

Editor - James Gallagher

Design - Edward White

Cover images: *Jesus, Sermon on the Mount* © The Art Archive/Bibliothèque Mazarine Paris/Kharbine-Tapabor/Coll. Jean Vigne

Mohammad, Last Sermon © The Art Archive/Turkish and Islamic Art Museum Istanbul/HarperCollins Publishers

#UT139 ISBN: 978-1-4361-9241-5

Course Syllabus

The Quest: The Historians' Search for Jesus and Muhammad

Photo courtesy of F. E. Peters

About Your Professor

F.E. Peters

F.E. Peters is professor emeritus of Middle Eastern studies and history at New York University, where he won a number of teaching awards. He received his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from Princeton University. Professor Peters's research interests include comparative studies of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Muslim Spain. Peters has appeared on television as an expert analyst in Middle Eastern history and religion, and has published many books, including *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Princeton University Press, 2007); *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (Princeton University Press, 2005); *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition, Volume II: The Words and Will of God* (Princeton University Press, 2005); *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition, Volume I: The Peoples of God* (Princeton University Press, 2003); *The Hajj* (Princeton University Press, 1995); *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (SUNY Press, 1994); *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton University Press, 1993); *Allah's Commonwealth: A History of Islam in the Near East, 600–1100 A.D.* (Simon & Schuster, 1973); *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2006, with John L. Esposito); a novel, *The Two Hundred Dollar Look* (L. Stuart, 1987); and his autobiography, *Ours: The Making and Unmaking of a Jesuit* (R. Marek Publishers, 1981).

Suggested Readings for This Course:

The Glorious Qur'an translated by M.W. Pickthall (Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2000).

Robert J. Miller's *The Complete Gospels* (Polebridge Press, 1995).

F.E. Peters's *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (SUNY Press, 1994).

Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus.* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001).

Ben Witherington's *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (InterVarsity Press, 1995).

Jesus, Sermon on the Mount © The Art Archive/Bibliothèque Mazarine Paris/Kharbine-Tapabor/Coll. Jean Vigne
Mohammad, Last Sermon © The Art Archive/Turkish and Islamic Art Museum Istanbul/HarperCollins Publishers

Left: Manuscript illumination of Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount, from *La Somme le Roi*, 1279, by Frère Laurent, Ms 870 f. 64, written at the request of Philip III the Bold, 1245–1285.

Right: Manuscript illustration of the Prophet Muhammad delivering his last sermon in Medina Mosque from *Siyar-i Nabi* (*Life of the Prophet*) composed by Mustafa Darir of Erzerum, Turkish Ottoman, Istanbul, seventeenth century.

Introduction

Jesus and Muhammad, the founders (in somewhat different senses) of the world's two most populous religious traditions, have been the objects of veneration since their own lifetime and, since the nineteenth century, the subjects of intense historical scrutiny by both believers and unbelievers. The "quest for the historical Jesus" has become almost a laboratory experiment in historiography, and there has been an increasing confidence in the results. The same quest for the "Muhammad of history," as opposed to the "Muhammad of faith," though conducted in much the same way, and with much the same kind of evidence—the testimony of believers—has been somewhat less successful. This series of lectures attempts to investigate why, and in the process expose the listener to the basic tools of historical inquiry: source, form, and redaction criticism, all in a comparative setting, and as applied to two very similar and yet very different—and very important—figures of the past.

Lecture 1:
Well-Known Is Not Well Known

The Subject

Jesus and Muhammad are two of the best-known men in the history of the world, and conceivably the very best known. The project here is to place them side by side and then compare two things: 1) the "quest" that has been conducted with regard to each of them, and 2) the similarities and differences in the careers of the two men.

A Personal Note

I am a historian, an academic historian, and I have spent most of my adult life studying Jesus and Muhammad and the expansive landscape that lies around both men. More specifically, I am an Islamicist and have written books about Muhammad and the origins of Islam, about Muhammad's hometown of Mecca, and about the *hajj* or the Muslim ritual pilgrimage.

My real interest in these matters has always been comparative, to compare and contrast the three great monotheistic siblings Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. What I am doing here is isolating the two founding figures of Christianity and Islam, Jesus and Muhammad, and subjecting the two of them to some comparative analysis.

The Name

I am calling this enterprise *The Quest*. I will confess up front to a bit of shameless larceny. "Quest" is part of the title of one of the most famous books written on the subject. In 1906, Albert Schweitzer, a church historian also known as a Bach scholar and organist as well as a medical missionary in Africa, published *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. As we shall see, it marked a milestone in the attempt to retrieve the historical Jesus, and the word serves to describe, with an echo, what is being attempted here.

An Enormous Investment

Jesus and Muhammad represent an enormous investment of faith and belief and an almost equal degree of disavowal and denial. What is at stake in opinions about Jesus and Muhammad is not merely the possibility of being right or wrong, but eternal salvation. If the believer gets it wrong about Jesus or Muhammad, the penalty is damnation, and the same fate awaits the unbeliever if he or she has miscalculated about one or the other of these holy men.

"I Believe . . ."

Jesus and Muhammad are built into the foundations of those communities we called Christianity and Islam, each of which today numbers somewhere in the neighborhood of a billion adherents. The Christian creed, a statement of what every Christian must affirm, contains the resonant phrase "and I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord . . ." Muslims too have a creed, although it is much simpler. There are only two articles. The first is "I bear witness that there is no god except the God." It is a simple statement

of pure monotheism. The second is as direct as the first: ". . . and that Muhammad is the sent one of God." In other words, the messenger who bears God's revelation.

It is clear then what the believers in each case must think about Jesus and Muhammad: the Christian that Jesus is the Son of God and the Muslim that Muhammad is the chosen messenger of God. The historian is somewhat taken aback by these patently theological judgments, but the solution seems obvious enough, to bypass the believers and to come to some kind of objective judgment based on the actual evidence.

The trouble is, as we shall soon discover, that all of our evidence about the two men comes exactly from believers, on Jesus from his earliest followers, and on Muhammad from Muslims of succeeding generations. One consequence of this latter fact has been skepticism about our ability to know anything about the "historical Jesus" or, equally, the "historical Muhammad."

The Total Skeptic

At times that skepticism has been total. Some have denied the very existence of Jesus: he didn't exist; he was invented by the Christians. That total skepticism seems unwarranted. Or perhaps it is simply misapprised on what constitutes evidence in ancient history. The evidence for Jesus and Muhammad, however tainted it might be in its judgments, is more plentiful than for any of their contemporaries, even the most famous.

The Relative Skeptic

But there is also surrounding Jesus and Muhammad a good deal of warranted relative skepticism. Both were holy men, and holy men are magnets for legend. Whether it's Mother Teresa or Nelson Mandela or Elvis Presley or George Washington, the heroic figure is going to be swathed in heroic myths.

We have special literary forms to enshrine those myths: the biography of the holy man or woman is called hagiography or, if the subject is a politician, a campaign biography. Each may be edifying reading but neither is really history.

Faith and History

Faith supplies answers; history asks questions, real questions, not the softball variety that occurs in lives of saints or on *Entertainment Tonight*. What does it feel like, what were you thinking, when you pitched that perfect game? Rather history asks, or should ask, the hardball, Mike Wallace questions: Who exactly, and what, and why?

Those are the questions that began to be posed to Jesus and Muhammad in the early decades of the nineteenth century. It is those kinds of questions that constitute *The Quest*.

Questions

1. What is referenced by the title of the course?
2. Why is much skepticism about Jesus and Muhammad warranted?

Lecture 2:
Clearing the Ground

When the "quest" began in the nineteenth century it had nothing to do with either Jesus or Muhammad. What the academic historians of that era were after was an objective view of history, to uncover the past "as it actually happened," or in a more contemporary idiom, "to tell it like it really is," or, more precisely, as it really was.

Albert Schweitzer

Objective history relies on evidence but also requires an objective historian. But as Schweitzer's book about the historians' search for the real or the actual Jesus demonstrated, the Jesus that emerged was close to a mirror image of what those historians themselves were: Liberal Protestant German theologians, and so the product was contrived to fit the paradigm of "The Good Shepherd," a kind of nineteenth-century Tom Hayden or Ralph Nader. What was missing, as Schweitzer pointed out, was the *echt* Jewish Jesus, the one whose message was summed up as "The End is upon us!"

The Critical-Historical Method

The nineteenth-century historians might have begun their quest with Roman history, but they soon enough discovered Bible history and its foundation texts. The quest for the historical Jesus was one result, but there inevitably followed the quest for the historical Muhammad. Both men were subjected to the rapidly evolving methods of historical criticism.

It should be remarked at the outset that the critical-historical method is a Western phenomenon that came to maturity in European academic circles in the nineteenth century, but whose roots go back to the Reformation and more recently to the Enlightenment. It is in its essence skeptical; it begins by doubting. And the result of skepticism was the search for historical judgments based on evidence and demonstrable proof. That evidence may be material, physical remains or artifacts, but more generally it consists in documents.

Scripture as a Document

The critical historians' view of documents required a rethinking of the literary texts that lay before them and particularly texts like the Jewish Bible, the Gospels, and the Quran, all of which were earmarked "Sacred Scripture," a rubric that cried out for "special treatment." It was part of the historians' orthodoxy to treat all texts simply as documents, to be subjected to the same vetting process that was applied to Livy or Thucydides, in short, to deny Scripture any special treatment or special consideration.

The Historian as Believer

The problem is now emerging in all its clarity. Our chief sources on Jesus and Muhammad are precisely those Scriptures, the New Testament and the Quran, and in the case of Muhammad, biographical writings that have achieved all but canonical status. So if we're ever to achieve the "historical Jesus" or the "historical Muhammad," it must be through the efforts of an

objective historian who was capable of reading the evidence as documents and not by those of the believer who was reading Scripture.

But here is the paradox. In more recent times, the Jesus quest has been largely conducted by Christians, many of whom are clerics and almost all of whom are theologians rather than historians. The quest of the historical Muhammad, on the other hand, if we understand that as critical-historical research into the career of the Prophet, has been entirely in the hands of non-Muslims, and more precisely of Westerners.

The Ideal Historian

Is the non-Christian the most objective student of Jesus, and the non-Muslim of Muhammad? To take the latter case, the non-Muslim would presumably have no problems in desacralizing Muhammad, in regarding him simply as a historical figure and the Quran as a document rather than Scripture. The Muslim, on the other hand, would bring to the enterprise a greater familiarity with the sources and a more nuanced understanding of Islam. But it must be understood that the task we are proposing, shorthanded as "the quest of the historical Muhammad," is a Western project. It is not the way Arabs, or Muslims, do history. Not that some have not tried. In the twentieth century there were a number of attempts on the part of Muslims to write not a secular history of Muhammad but to introduce secular criteria, economic, political, even psychological, into an assessment of the Prophet of Islam. The Egyptian Muhammad Haykal, the Iranian Ali Dashti, and the Pakistani Muhammad Hamidullah all put their hands to the critical-historical task in varying degrees. The results are middling and are chiefly interesting by reason of the mere fact that they were undertaken.

The Mischief of History

The critical approach to Jesus and the Gospels, which is often perceived not as an objective pursuit but as part of an active agenda to undermine Christian faith, has provoked, and continues to provoke, unease in many Christian circles. But the enterprise has been underway for almost two hundred years now, and many Christians have learned either to ignore this particular strand of the Western intellectual tradition or attempt to integrate its findings into their own faith.

Muslims as individuals are as sensitive on the subject of Muhammad as Christians are about Jesus, and as a society are even more so. But Muslims find it far more difficult either to ignore or to integrate what most of them regard as a Christian (and Jewish)—or alternately a secular Western—effort to disrespect the Prophet and to undermine Islam. Christians live in secular societies where skepticism is a practical alternative to faith; Muslims by and large do not: there is no protected skeptical alternative to faith. Critical studies of the Prophet are not regarded kindly in most Muslim circles.

So are non-Muslims, then, the best historians of Muhammad?

On the evidence, it is not an easy case to make. Western non-Muslims do not come to Muhammad with no preconceptions: almost from the beginning the Prophet of Islam was a well-known figure to Christians, first in the East and then in the West. At first the Christians thought Islam was so like their own faith that it must be a heresy, that some disgruntled and ill-informed

monk had caught the ear of Muhammad and filled it with an off-center version of Christianity.

As knowledge of both Muhammad and the Quran increased, this bemused rejection of a vague heresy turned into full-blown polemic against a full-blown rival and a dangerous enemy. In the case of Muhammad, biography became the instrument of polemic and Western lives of the Prophet continued well into the twentieth century to be full-scale takedowns of both the man personally—no one so interested in war and violence could be God's prophet—and his preaching and beliefs.

Are Muslims the best historians of Jesus?

This is the reciprocal question. As a matter of fact, no. Jesus is an oft-cited figure in the Quran, where he is put forward as perhaps the greatest of the prophets—Muhammad is the last of the prophetic line—a figure of enormous spiritual stature and importance. And as he is in the Quran, so he is for Muslims. Muslims are no more likely to be objective on the subject of Jesus than other Christians themselves.

And what of the Jews?

They would seem to have no horse in this race and so might be expected to be objective about both Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus was after all a Jew, and Christianity is a phenomenon that started as a Jewish perhaps reform movement that developed into a Jewish sect, thence into a Jewish heresy, thence into a full-blown religion that carried within itself a profound, Scripture-derived conviction that the Jews had killed Jesus. There is no Jew who is not aware of this.

As for Muhammad, in Jewish eyes, he cannot be a prophet, since prophecy ended with the Bible. He first heard that from the contemporary Jews of Medina, whom he eventually made to pay for their rejection. Jews lived for many centuries under Muslim sovereignty, an experience that looks golden only when compared to the parallel experience of living under the political sovereignty of Christians—to which must be added the most recent political confrontations between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East.

And yet. And yet. Jews have made great contributions to both quests. The Jewish understanding of Jesus' own Jewish context has produced outstanding contributions from the likes of David Flusser and Geza Vermes, and the contributions of Jewish scholarship to the quest for the historical Muhammad has been even more impressive. The German rabbi Abraham Geiger and the towering Hungarian scholar Ignaz Goldziher opened the door to an entirely new understanding of Muhammad and Islam, and in more recent days Israeli scholars like Moshe Kister, Uri Rubin, and Michael Lecker, to name only three, have added immeasurably to our understanding of Muhammad and his environment.

Questions

1. Who are the ideal historians of Muhammad?
2. Who are the ideal historians of Jesus?

Lecture 3:
The Settings:
First-Century Judea, Seventh-Century Hejaz

Jews and Christians are communities of believers that are committed to history: they are not founded on myth. Both the Gospels and the biography of Muhammad present themselves as historical records, as narratives of events that took place at a specific time in a specific place. Both men lived in that specific place which constituted their environment: physical, political, economic, social, and religious. It is not being suggested here that they were simply products of the environment; rather, they were influenced by it.

Jesus' Environment

Josephus

By all our indicators, Jesus lived in Palestine in the opening decades of what is now called the first century A.D. We know a good deal about that time and place thanks to the Jewish historian Josephus, who between 75 and 95 A.D. produced two major historical works. One, *The Jewish War*, was an account of the great insurrection raised by the Jews against Rome in the years between 66 and 70 A.D. The other, called *Antiquities of the Jews*, is a survey of Jewish history from the beginnings down to the author's own day and was written for the benefit of Gentile readers. It was intended to explain to the non-Jews the background of these troublesome people who had just caused such problems for the Roman Empire. But it was intended for Jewish readers as well and it was written in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the educated and literate all around the Mediterranean.

Josephus's account of recent Jewish history is filled with the *sturm und drang* of an unhappy era. The Jews of those days were caught between the oppression of a half-Jewish king, Herod, surnamed, not entirely inappropriately, The Great, with a penchant for wars, political grandstanding, architectural grandiosity, and mortal familial mischief. He left a towering legacy in the Jerusalem Temple that was eighty years in the building and was destroyed eight years after its completion. But the price for this and other equally expensive projects was paid by his people, still generally an agricultural peasantry who bore the burden of his taxes.

The Climate of Palestine

It was not borne patiently. Josephus's *Antiquities* is filled with stories of social and political unrest, first against Herod, then against his sons who succeeded him, and finally against the Romans who grew tired of the Herodian heirs and annexed Palestine piece by piece to their empire. In 66 A.D., three decades after Jesus, there was a fully armed insurrection, a true war, against Rome, but in the preceding years, those covering the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth, there were repeated brushfires throughout the land, and nowhere more consistently or dangerously than in Galilee, where Jesus lived. Prophets and messiahs appeared, briefly flamed, and were stamped out. As we learned from Josephus, Jesus, the messiah from Nazareth, was by no means an isolated figure.

Josephus was a very political man, but he also had an eye for other forms of combustion. He was our best instructor on the Jewish sects of the day, which he calls, for the benefit of his Hellenized readers, "schools," which hardly does justice to the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, who between them, and other lesser-known groups, divided the allegiance of Jews interested in the identity and future of their religion. Josephus gives us a look at some of those marginal groups and their leaders, John the Baptist among them, and Jesus and his brother James.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

We will return to those particular texts a little bit later, but here attention must be drawn to the Essenes. In the case of all of these "schools" mentioned by Josephus, we are chiefly dependent on him for our information regarding them. We had no writings of the Pharisees or Sadducees or Essenes, not at least until 1947 when what appears to be a library of this latter group was discovered in caves high above the northwest corner of the Dead Sea. These are the famous Dead Sea Scrolls and they give us an unparalleled view of one particular Jewish group as it was functioning during Jesus' lifetime (we can date the life of the community that produced them from mid-third century to precisely 68 A.D., when they were destroyed during the insurrection). Here was a sectarian community of Jews who were organized in a tightly knit and closely wardened assembly that expected the advent of not one but two messiahs in the rapidly approaching End Time.

We have, then, some highly informative texts regarding Jesus' environment. We can form a fairly good idea of what it was to be a Jew in rural Galilee in the first century of our era. And not merely from texts. Israel may be the most archaeologized land per acre on the entire face of the earth, and most of the time the countryside looks like an ant hill of people in shorts with hairy or shaved legs moving earth around with trowels. The results are in their books. To Josephus's political and social kaleidoscope, we can now add a sense of the material culture of Jesus' home province of Galilee.

Muhammad's Environment

Mecca

Muhammad was born in Arabia, which is roughly the size of the Eastern United States from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. He lived in the area called the Hejaz, the strip of western Arabia running roughly from what is today the Jordanian frontier down to the borders of the Yemen. His hometown in the Hejaz was Mecca, midway down the western coast of Arabia and forty-five miles inland from the Red Sea. Two hundred seventy-five miles to the northwest lies Medina, the town where he spent the last twelve years of his life.

The Absence of Archaeology

The geography is easy: we can do it from satellite. What is not so easy is to reconstruct the life of either Mecca or Medina in the seventh century A.D. There is, alas, no Josephus for Muhammad, no Dead Sea Scrolls, and no archaeology. Arabia is not an anthill of archaeologists. There is some archaeology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but it is chiefly on Iron or Bronze Age sites or reconstructing the early days of the House of Saud and Dira'iyya or

Burayda. Excavation in Mecca or Medina is neither encouraged nor even permitted. Even if it were, there is no great expectation that anything useful would be found, since Muhammad's towns were built chiefly of mud brick, and Mecca in particular sat full astride a wadi bottom down where flash floods came precipitously and periodically washed away whatever stood there.

The Sources

Mecca's highly literate neighbors to the north and east seem to be unaware of its existence. There is, at any rate, no reference to the town in either the Byzantine sources—and the Byzantines were very interested in Arabia, as both a market and a missionary field—and none either in the writings of the Iranian Sasanians, who also had their aspirations in Arabia. Both societies knew the Yemen and knew too the Bedouin of the Great Syrian steppe, but the Hejaz was a blank space on the maps of both empires.

What we know, then, about Muhammad's environment comes from a set of later Muslim documents, from the valuable hints buried in the Quran to the information provided, often quite lavishly, by our literary sources from a century or more after Muhammad's death. Almost all of them describe the commercial life of Mecca and Muhammad's role in it, but we encounter real difficulties when it comes to the religious environment. Muslims designate their past, that is, everything that occurred from the creation of the world down to Muhammad's migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina as "The Ignorance" or "The Barbarism." The name illustrates a profound devalorization of the past, particularly the religious past. One Muslim at least attempted to describe that discredited era of paganism. Ibn al-Kalbi's (ca. 750 A.D.) *Book of Idols* is your main source, fleshed out and/or corrected from what we know of comparative Semitic religion or from the evidence of other Arabs scattered around the more literate areas of the Fertile Crescent in Late Antiquity.

A Shrine Town

Mecca emerges from this mélange of sources as a fragile shrine town. In its midst stood an ancient stone building, the Ka'ba, thought to be the [unoccupied] residence of The God, in Arabic, *Allah*. It was surrounded by an open area designated as a taboo zone (*haram*), which in Muhammad's day was filled with the stone idols of a variety of gods. We don't know the back story of the shrine: perhaps the place became sacred because of the presence of a spring there. But the ruling tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh, managed to turn a shrine to their advantage. They collected the idols of the surrounding Bedouin tribes into their haram, and then, under the protection of the sacred truce, invited those Bedouin to enter the town to worship and then to conduct business in a series of local fairs associated with the Bedouins' rituals. This combination of religion and commerce brought a degree of prosperity to Mecca, which, by Muhammad's day, stood at the center of a local trading network.

Questions

1. What can be learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls?
2. What is meant by "The Ignorance"?

Lecture 4:
Opening the File on Jesus

The File on Jesus

The evidence for Jesus falls into three categories: that by pagans, that by Jews, and that by Christians.

The Pagan Sources

The word "pagan" bothers some; it seems derogatory. Well, it is derogatory. It's a term used by the Christians to describe the last outback holdouts against Christianity, and can be roughly translated as "hillbilly" or perhaps "trailer trash." In any event, the classical pagan seems to have disappeared. More, the pagan sources on Jesus are somewhat illusory. Like the material evidence, they simply confirm or, at best, enlarge our knowledge of the background. They fill in information about the career of Pontius Pilate, for example, or the system of tax collection under Roman auspices in Palestine. At their very best they confirm for us that in the 60s in Rome there were a group of religious fanatics who called themselves "Christers."

The Jewish Sources

Josephus has already been mentioned. In his *Antiquities* he not only provides abundant political and religious background for the era but he also mentions, in a paragraph or so, John the Baptist and Jesus and Jesus' brother James. At first glance, this is extraordinary good fortune for the historian. Josephus says that Jesus was a wonderworker and the teacher, that he was condemned to death by the Roman governor Pilate, and that his followers later claimed that he had risen from the dead. But he also says "He was the Messiah" and that he had actually appeared to his followers after his death. Good fortune immediately turns to a suspicion that the Christians later tampered with the text of Josephus and in fact inserted this entire paragraph into his text. It may indeed be so, but one tenth-century Arab Christian author quotes this same passage of Josephus without the Christianizing elements and thus in the form that many believe that Josephus originally wrote it.

This particular paragraph aside, we learn from Josephus that Jesus fits comfortably into the pattern of prophet-messiahs that appeared among the Jews before and during the lifetime of Jesus.

Visionary and apocalyptic writings were popular in that era. Apocalypse is an unveiling, in this instance an unveiling of the events of the last days of human history. It is God's conclusion to his creation and, it was piously hoped, the final vindication of Israel in the face of its enemies. The time of terror would yield to the time of triumph, and in the midst of the latter would stand a figure of Israel's liberation, the Anointed One, Messiah. Not all Jews of Jesus' day believed in the imminence of the End Time nor in a Messiah. Jesus' followers obviously did, and the shape and color of their belief can be read off the pages of this apocalyptic literature.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The scrolls reveal just one such apocalyptic community in the grip of expectation of the End Time. But they teach us something else as well, namely, how Jesus' Jewish contemporaries read Scripture—and non-scriptural books as well—and extracted from it the justification for their own beliefs and practices. How Jesus read and understood the Bible, and how his followers did after him, is all on display in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Rabbis

The rabbis also weigh in on Jesus, though from distant Babylon (Iraq) at an interval of four hundred to six hundred years after the event. And what they do say reveals far more about the status of the Jews in pre-Islamic Iraq than it does about the historical Jesus. According to the statements regarding Jesus in the Talmud, his birth was illegitimate: he was the son of Miriam (by one account a hairdresser), who had conceived of a certain Pantheros, a Roman soldier. By the same accounts, Jesus was put to death by the Jews, either by crucifixion or by hanging, on the capital charge of having led the people astray.

The Christian Sources

Finally, we come to our chief evidence for Jesus, namely the material contained in the collection known as the New Testament. The New Testament is in effect an argument, a brief to the effect that the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant had been redrawn in the person of Jesus, who was the Messiah promised by the prophets. The documents assembled there consist of the four works called Gospels or "Good News"; a work of history called, somewhat misleadingly, "The Acts of the Apostles"; a number of letters, chiefly those of Paul, a very early Jewish convert to the cause of Jesus, but also of the apostles Peter and John and Jude, and of Jesus' brother James; and finally an Apocalypse or Revelation, the Christian version of a familiar Jewish literary genre, a visionary unveiling of the End Time, now seen from a Christian perspective. These documents appear to date from the first century: the earliest of them are certainly Paul's letters written in the 50s and the latest the Apocalypse, which was probably written toward the very end of the century.

The Gospels

Even though Paul's letters are the earliest documents in the New Testament, they have very little to say about the life and teachings of Jesus: their overweening concern is the significance of Jesus' life and particularly of his death and resurrection for the first-generation followers to whom Paul's letters were addressed.

The four Gospels of the New Testament are a different matter, however. They're cast in the form that we would identify as a biography, even though they do not name themselves as such—the Greek word for biography is *bios* or "Life"—but rather "The Good News," in Greek *euangelion*.

The Gospels individually identify themselves, though not exactly by author: "The Good News according to Matthew" or Mark or Luke or John. So we are told that we are getting four different versions of what is essentially the same

Good News. Of the four, three, those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are quite similar in their structure, their approach, what they include, and often even their very words. Since they cover the same ground in the same way, they have been termed "synoptic." John, however, is quite different. He covers different incidents, in a different order, and according to a different chronology. In the Synoptics, Jesus speaks generally in aphorisms or in homely parables; in John, in long discourses of considerable theological sophistication. He omits a great deal of what's in the Synoptics and adds a great deal that is not.

Sequencing

The three synoptic Gospels are obviously related in some not very obvious way, and to understand that interrelationship, it is first necessary to attempt to sequence them. This is not a simple matter because there are no internal hooks on which to attach dates. Mark is the shortest of the three. Its style is the most primitive and least polished, its narrative the most direct. For all these reasons there is a general consensus that Mark is the earliest of the synoptic Gospels.

Once this is conceded—the word "proved" somewhat inappropriate here—it becomes apparent, from the two hundred or so verses identical in all three, that Matthew and Luke had used Mark; that he was a written source lying before them when they composed their versions of the Good News.

But something else is apparent if we put the three Synoptics side-by-side. There are another two-hundred odd verses more or less identical in both Matthew and Luke but which are not found in Mark. They must then have another source. The nineteenth-century scholars formed a convincing hypothesis named "Q," for the German *Quelle* or "source."

If we look more closely at what constitutes Q, it becomes apparent that Q was a collection of Jesus' sayings, his *logia*, if you have a taste for Greek. And just sayings. There is no death by crucifixion, no resurrection.

The Jesus questers of the nineteenth century thought that they had uncovered in Q an interesting new source for Matthew and Luke. It adds no new information, of course, since the Q material was there in those two Gospels from the very beginning. In the second half of the twentieth century Q was regarded in a quite different way. One of the reasons is the discovery in 1945 of a manuscript of a work that called itself "The Gospel of Thomas." What it was was a collection of one hundred fourteen sayings of Jesus, some of them echoed from the Gospels, some not. But the important thing is that it was a Gospel. So it was possible to conceive of a sayings collection like Q as a genuine Gospel. And this Jesus message, like Q, presented a Jesus who had not died on the cross and had not risen from the dead. The Jesus of both Thomas and Q was simply a teacher-preacher.

The Gospel of Thomas, which was a Coptic translation of a Greek original now known only in fragments, was part of a fourth-century sectarian library uncovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The sectarians were known as Gnostics, an early Christian movement condemned by the mainstream churches, in a library that included a number of works bearing the title of "Gospel" that do not appear in the New Testament. They came to be called "apocryphal."

The Apocrypha

The word means “reserved” or “restricted” and is a term used to describe works not included in the official collection. Thus Apocrypha, Jewish works like those attributed to Enoch and Baruch and that are not included in the Jewish Bible, and in this instance the New Testament Apocrypha, works that make some claim to authenticity—in its simplest terms, by merely calling itself a “Gospel”—are not included in the New Testament.

The New Testament is the scriptural canon or standard for the entire Christian Church, and it is understood this way. That canon is clearly a product of an age when the Universal or Catholic Church, as it styled itself, had come into existence. The institutional debut of that Universal Church was a solemn convocation of all its bishops at Nicea in 325 A.D. by order of the Emperor Constantine. It was then and in the years following that a scriptural canon could be ratified and promulgated. But that’s only the end of the story. On all the evidence, by the second century, Christians were using in their church services these four Gospels and these alone. So it appears that relatively early on there had developed a consensual canon among the individual churches/congregations of Christians around the Mediterranean.

It is virtually apparent that in this context “canon” is a theological and juridical term. It is a judgment that these works, like the New Testament as a whole, bear authentic witness to Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. This is the Church’s standard, but it is of use to the historian only in so far as it reflects a judgment about the historicity of the Gospels. This it does in part—for Christians the “real” Jesus is undoubtedly the historical Jesus—but there was more than history at stake in the fashioning of this canon and modern historians in particular are wary of overprivileging the Church’s “canonical” Gospels. They want to dissolve the distinction between “canonical” and “apocrypha”: each gospel should be judged on its own merits as a historical document.

What the historian is looking for is a source on Jesus that is both early and independent, that is, it is not simply repeating or paraphrasing what it has derived from other, earlier documents. Most of the apocryphal Gospels that are preserved—many of them we know only by their titles—fall into the derived category. The Gospel of Thomas, for example, is thought by many to be dependent on the synoptic Gospels. Many too are late creations devoted to selling out or amplifying the Jesus story already known from the canonical Gospels.

Dating the Sources

If the death of Jesus can be located on or about the year 30 A.D., how much after it were our sources composed? There are no dates in the Gospels themselves. Historians have had to rely on indirection. In the year 70 A.D., at the end of the Jews’ failed insurrection, the Romans took the city of Jerusalem after a savage siege in the course of which Herod’s great Temple, which had finally been completed only eight years before, was set afire and razed to the ground. It meant the end of Jewish sacrificial worship of their God, which for hundreds of years could be performed only by the priests in the great scripturally authenticated Temple. By all accounts it was a dramatic

and a traumatic event. Is the event mentioned in the Gospels? If so, they may be safely dated to after 70; if not—it is inconceivable in the life of someone whose fate was somehow tied to that of the Temple that such an event should not be mentioned—then it is conceivable that such a work was composed before 70 A.D.

Q makes no mention of the destruction of the Temple, and if we turn to Mark, which has already been judged to be the oldest of the Synoptics, most critics seem to think there is some reflection of the events of 70 in Mark chapter 13, which professes to be Jesus' own apocalyptic vision of the End Time. So this Gospel is generally dated, with considerable wiggle room that reflects the uncertainty of the judgment, "circa 60–70 A.D." Since Matthew and Luke, who have their own apocalyptic chapters (Mt. 24:1–31; Lk. 21:5–28) that are parallel to Mark's, both used Mark's Gospel as a source, time must be allowed for the latter to be in circulation. Hence the dating of Matthew and Luke is usually put at 80–90 A.D.

And what of John?

Was he independent of the Synoptics? And when was the fourth Gospel composed? John is a source of great complexity. It represents a finished literary composition (with a very probable tack-on) of both great originality—John describes miracles and events in the life of Jesus unmentioned by the Synoptics—and at the same time it has an urgent historicity: he seems to know more about the political and topographical details of Jesus' Palestine and Jerusalem than the other three. At the same time, John is less a reporter and more of an author than the others. His Jesus has a very distinct point of view that is enunciated in highly sophisticated language and imagery, which is quite alien to the aphoristic and homely Jesus portrayed in Mark and Q, for example. The consensus opinion is, first, that John in all likelihood knew the Synoptics but preferred to go his own way, and second, that in many instances John also represents a firsthand eyewitness tradition to the life of Jesus.

The Dating of John

Many critics have been persuaded by its sophisticated theology that it must be quite late, and that judgment is strengthened for others by John's apparent references to an already existing community of Christians at odds with their fellow Jews. On these grounds, John has been put at "circa 90–100." But both these criteria, the high theological view of Jesus and the presence of community tensions between Jesus' followers and their fellow Jews, are already present in Paul, whose letters can be dated with absolute certainty to the mid-50s of the first century.

In sum, what we have for the historical Jesus are what appear to be three independent sources: Mark, Q, and John.

Questions

1. What light does Josephus shed on early Christianity?
2. Why was it at first difficult to conceive of Q as a Gospel?

Lecture 5:
Opening the File on Muhammad

There is little physical or material evidence for Muhammad. He lived in what was an ephemeral physical environment, where the settled population lived in buildings of mud brick—the Ka'ba was reportedly the only stone building in Mecca, which was nonetheless often taken down by flash floods—and the nomadic or Bedouin population left few if any traces behind them. The archaeology of Arabia is the excavation of memory.

In the case of Jesus, the closest we can get to the actual person, where we can hear his own voice, is probably in the sayings source called "Q." We can do the same with the Muslims' own "Q," in this instance the Quran. But these are, like Jesus' aphorisms in "Q," sayings without context. To supply that context we must turn to the Muslim biographical tradition.

The Quran

The Quran is the collection of Muhammad's reportedly inspired utterances that date from after his "call" to prophethood at Mecca, traditionally dated to 610 A.D., and that continued to his death in 632.

A brief pause over "inspired." Jesus was thought by his followers not so much inspired as speaking with the authority of God himself, his "Father in heaven." The Gospels, on the other hand, were regarded as inspired, written as they were by human hands under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Muhammad was regarded as inspired in the sense that what issued from his mouth in the identifiable "revelational mode" had come word for word from God through the agency of the Angel Gabriel. There was no human agency or conditioning involved in Muhammad's utterances, and though our Quran is the product of human editing, its contents share the same divine guarantee as Muhammad's words.

The Making of Our Quran

As the revelations, or better, "the recitation" (Arabic: *al-qur'an*), emerged from his mouth, Muhammad's small band of believers, the *muslimum* or "submitters" (*islam* means "submission"), memorized and recited them as a form of worship under his own guidance. Then, shortly after Muhammad's death, the traditional account continues, his divinely inspired utterances began to be retrieved and collected from the memories of his contemporaries and from scraps and pieces of writing in that barely literate society. These early processes are not entirely clear to us, but the tradition insists that sometime about 650 A.D., some twenty-odd years after Muhammad's death, there was available a standard written text of the Quran, a book that is in essence our present Quran. The revelations had been collected and divided into one hundred fourteen *sûras* or chapters.

Authenticity

There is an almost universal consensus that the Quran is authentic, that the text that stands before us is the product of one man, Muhammad. It may not

be all Muhammad pronounced—indeed, there is good evidence that all his revelations are not in our Quran—but there is no indication of interpolation or tampering. But it is an edited text. The anonymous editors of the Quran created the *sûras* or chapters, regrouped and even combined Muhammad's utterances, provided titles for the *sûras* and then arranged them in what is roughly—we're only guessing—the descending order of length.

Usefulness

The way the Quran presents itself, it is generally God who is speaking, either threateningly to an audience of Meccan pagans in the earliest utterances or instructively to a community of "submitters" at Medina in the later ones. If such is the case, God (or Muhammad speaking on his behalf) is interested in "submission," but not much interested in either local or contemporary history. The Quran's interest in the past is overwhelmingly in Sacred History, the story of Creation and the histories of the various prophets from Abraham to Jesus sent to humankind to keep them on the straight path. Of Mecca and the Meccans, even of Muhammad, we are told very little.

Restoring the History

But if the secular historian believes, as he or she must, that what came forth from Muhammad's mouth is Muhammad's own, then the Quran is all about Muhammad, an unparalleled authentic record of his religious thinking. And an evolutionary one as well, since the pronouncements are spread out over twenty-two years. Jesus' public career lasted barely two years; Muhammad's stretched over more than two decades.

The Quran, like Q, is without context: we have to attempt to reconstruct the circumstances that provoked each prophetic utterance, most of which give the strong impression of being "occasional." More, the editors robbed the Quran of a great deal of its historical value by combining and rearranging its contents in such a way as to destroy their chronological order. It is no matter to the believer. Every verse of the Quran, like every verse of the Bible, is absolutely and unconditionally true.

Reordering the Rearrangement

The condition is not irremediable, and both Muslims and non-Muslims alike had strong motives for attempting to discern the chronological order of the revelations. Muslims had both a historical and a legal motive. Once they began to interest themselves in Muhammad's life, they began the process of matching up Quranic verses with remembered incidents of the Prophet's life. Or perhaps it was the other way around: the Quranic verses, repeated over and over again, promoted wonder at what was happening behind the naked revelation. And the revelations had also to be unpacked. The verses are divine guidance and it is important to get it right, not only individually but also as a community, a congregation of believers.

Abrogation

Finally, Muslims have a particular reason for sorting out the chronology of the Quran. In Quran 2:106, God instructs them, "None of our revelations [or verses] do We cancel or cause to be forgotten without substituting something better and similar." This is the famous theory of "Cancellation" or "Abrogation": one Quranic verse, obviously a later one, may cancel another earlier one.

Discovering the chronological order of the *sûras* has been done chiefly on internal evidence: changes of style and tone and audience that reflect changing settings, changing challenges, and changing objectives. Both Muslims and non-Muslims alike have come up with their chronological lists and they are not very different. The results are convincing, at least in their general categories, distinguishing Meccan and Medinan *sûras* and dividing the former, where the changes are more rapid and obvious, into an Early, Middle, and Late Period. But problems remain, most notoriously that of the combined *sûras,* where ragged seams show that a number of revelations have been made into a single *sûra.*

The Biographical (*Sira*) Tradition

Oral societies do not have the written word to record the events and actors of the past. They remember important or remarkable things, deaths not births, prodigies of nature or achievement. But the records of memory carry no dates: events occur "long ago" or "during the famine" or "in the year of the flood."

Memories of Muhammad

We can be certain that the Muslims had memories of Muhammad. For many they began with his rise to public consciousness as a preacher in Mecca and they became progressively stronger as his power and prominence increased at Medina. And his followers remembered his sayings, or rather God's own sayings, which they repeated and memorized. Memories of Jesus' life and sayings were embedded in a narrative very soon after his death, when his followers began to preach the "Good News of Jesus," which was really the Good News *about* Jesus. For Muslims, the "Good News" was not Muhammad, but the Quran, which calls itself (16:89) precisely that, *bushra,* "good news*."* Memories of Muhammad himself, of his ordinary talk and of his doings at Medina, floated free of the Quran.

The Gap in the Sources

Between the Quran and the earliest preserved writing by Muslims there is a gap of a century or more. The still illiterate Arabian Muslims used their new literate subjects in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq as their scribes and record keepers—and even to keep the records in their own vernacular tongues—while the Muslim elite, which preferred to live in all-Arab cantonments rather than amidst their alien rivals in the old cities of the Middle East, was engaged in the more attractive activity of conquest and tribute-taking. It took a century for the Arab Muslims to learn to write and perhaps even longer to fashion their primitive script into a facile instrument for writing.

Ibn Ishaq

Sometime around 750 appeared the "The Raids" of Ibn Ishaq (d. 761). It was not only a life of Muhammad, but apparently—the work is now lost—a widely ranging "world history" from a Muslim perspective. The original seems to have had three parts. The first, the "Book of the Beginning," quite literally began with Creation and passed down through the history of the Prophets, biblical and Arabian, to where it was thought Arab history began. The second, the "Book of the Sending Forth," is about the commencement of Muhammad's prophetic mission, which is preceded in this account by an overview of early South

Arabian history. And finally, there was the "Book of Raids," the heart of the enterprise that began at Muhammad's "migration" (*hjira*) from Mecca to Medina.

Ibn Ishaq's original work may in fact have been driven out of circulation—in the medieval Muslim world that would mean it would cease being publicly performed and/or recopied—by an edited version of itself by Ibn Hisham (d. 813) called—and this is the first occurrence of the title in this context—"The Life *(Sira*) of the Messenger of God." Whether edited down or not, Ibn Ishaq's material and approach seem quickly to have become the standard treatment of the Prophet's life and times.

The Ibn Hisham Edition

Ibn Hisham was a traditionist: he specialized in the accurate transmission of traditions or reports about the Prophet. Not only did he reduce the Ibn Ishaq original into a more manageably sized and focused biography of the Prophet; he wielded a severe scalpel on material within the *Life*. Great swathes of poetry were removed as well as what smelled to him like Jewish or Christian interventions that had come from new converts to Islam. In the same vein, he was opposed to storytelling, though it would have been difficult to remove those elements, particularly from Muhammad's career at Mecca. As a corrective, he attempted to tie the events of Muhammad's life as closely as possible to the givens of the Quran. And Ibn Hisham had quite another, and quite unhistorical, agenda: he wanted the *Life* to be edifying and so he also removed whatever he thought was inappropriate to the Messenger of God. This, then, is the basic biographical torso the later historian has to work with, the *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq in the Ibn Hisham version, and whatever else we can glean of the original from the fragments and treatments embedded in later writers.

Beyond Ibn Hisham

Those later writers are principally Waqidi (d. 823), Ibn Sa'd (d. 843), and finally, and preeminently, Tabari (d. 923). The first was the author, with an assist from Ibn Ishaq, of a clear-cut *Raids*, which shows us rather exactly what the original core of a Muhammad biography looked like. The second composed a *Life,* again relying on Ibn Ishaq material, to stand at the head of his *Classes*, a kind of biographical dictionary arranged by generation, proceeding from Muhammad's own contemporaries, the "Companions of the Prophet," down to the present. Finally, Tabari is the author of the *Annals*, a monumental chronological progress through the history of Islam from its Iranian background down to the present day. The life of the Prophet is a long and rewarding stop on that parade. Tabari relied heavily on Ibn Ishaq and, what is useful for us, in a version different from the one that Ibn Hisham had before him.

Bukhari and the "Prophetic Reports"

With Bukhari (d. 870), the author of the celebrated collection of Prophetic traditions called "The Sound" (*Al-Sahîh*), we have left history-writing as such and entered into the domain of the lawyer. Islamic law is peculiarly a law of precedent; it stands, however, not *ex decisis* but *ex revelatis.* The basis of all Islamic law is the revealed Quran, but where the Quran is silent or non-specific, the law resorts first and principally to "the custom of the Prophet." The latter is preserved in individual case reports. These are the celebrated and notorious "Prophetic traditions" (*hadîth*), vignettes that embody the sayings or deeds

attributed to Muhammad and are attested to by an attached chain of authorities going back to eyewitnesses to the Prophet's career. These Prophetic traditions began to be assembled and scrutinized in the ninth century and one of the most famous and influential collections was that of Bukhari, with its guarantee that the traditions contained therein were "sound" (*sahîh*).

Bukhari's *Sahîh* is a book by a lawyer for the use of lawyers. The first chapter is entitled "How the Revelation to the Apostle of God Began." After five traditions on the effect of the revelational experience on Muhammad, there begins what is not marked as a new chapter, but appears to be such, on "The Merits of the Prophet's Companions." These "Companions" are, of course, the eyewitnesses to Muhammad's behavior. These are immediately followed by twenty-nine sections covering, in chronological order, episodes in the life of Muhammad.

Western Historicism and Its Discontents

Authenticity in Ibn Ishaq's biography and Waqidi's classical version of "The Raids" surely rests on the preserved reminiscences of Muhammad's contemporaries. Our problem is discerning whether any such is represented in the material at hand. To solve it, we must inquire how and for what reasons the material was transmitted in the three or three-and-a-half generations between Muhammad's and that of Ibn Ishaq. There are two general paths of transmission that can be discerned: that of the Prophetic traditions, where the transmission may have been written or oral and the motives legal or historical, and that of the entertaining narratives, the "tales" (*qisas*) passed down orally in the first generations of Islam.

The first possibility carries us into one of the most crucial and debated areas of Islamic history. The great bulk of the preserved Prophetic traditions have to do with legal issues. Such, for example, are most of those collected in Bukhari's *Sahîh*. They are designated sound because in the ninth century Muslims were beginning to have doubts about the authenticity of many of these reports and subjected them to intense scrutiny. The scrutiny focused on the chains of transmitting authorities—whether each could have transmitted the tradition in question and was of reliable moral probity—that was put at the head of every tradition. A new scrutiny began on the part of Western scholars in the nineteenth century and concluded that a great many of the Prophetic traditions were forgeries concocted to advance political or sectarian aims or to support what was in fact nothing more than local legal traditions. Initially the investigation had to do with the legal traditions, but in the early past of this century it was extended to the historical traditions, the stuff of Ibn Ishaq's life, and with equally negative results.

The authenticity of the Prophetic reports continues to be debated, but the issue has shifted away from the content, to the larger question of their transmission: were they written or oral, and, if written down, when? There is some support for their being written down, perhaps in the form of "collections of historical documents and memoranda in private collections," and even in the lifetime of the eyewitnesses who stand at the far end of the chains of authority. However, a strong current of skepticism continues to run through most Western studies of the Prophetic traditions, including the historical ones. In the eyes of the skeptics, the Prophetic traditions were orally transmitted for a

century and a half after Muhammad's death and during that period underwent substantial transformation.

The Tales of Wahb

Even more disturbing to the historian is the not unlikely possibility that all the preserved biographies of Muhammad may owe far more to the art of story-telling than to any actual historical recollection. Here the critical figure is Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 728 or 732). His family, of Iranian origin, was long domesticated in the Yemen, and Wahb himself, a Muslim from birth, was considered as a specialist on Judeo-Christian matters. He wrote/lectured on the history of the prophets and the history of South Arabia, both topics that loom large in Ibn Ishaq's work, and a "Book of Campaigns," the antecedent, if not the source, of both Ibn Ishaq's and Waqidi's compositions on that subject.

Later, more self-conscious authorities hastened to disassociate themselves from Wahb since he was not a "traditionist," a transmitter of traditions with presumably high standards of verification, but a story-teller (*qissas*), an entertainer, who, like others of his guild, enlarged upon the Quran by supplying pleasant (and plausible) contexts in the life of Muhammad for this revelation or that. Plausible does not, of course, mean true, as may be seen on the almost infinite variety of traditions on any given moment in Muhammad's life. We have fragments of one of Wahb's versions of early Islamic history and both Ibn Ishaq and Waqidi likely had—and used—other complete versions of tales of the prophets and tales of Muhammad, a likelihood that casts profound doubts on the veracity of what we read in those later authors.

Toward a Life

The extant *Lives* of Muhammad thus represent a serious methodological problem for anyone attempting to reconstruct the biography of the Prophet of Islam. It is difficult to deny that some of the material found there is grounded in historical fact, and it is not inconceivable that accurate memories may be passed on orally over three or even four generations. But who passed it on, and why, is what gives us pause. From the outset, it must be understood that the Quran is our soundest guide.

But not our only one. All the modern biographers of Muhammad have attempted to combine the two sources just described, the Quran and the narrative sources. The biographical tradition, no matter how suspect, has been used to provide a chronological—or at least a sequential—framework over and against which to arrange whatever data may be wrested from the Quran. Some of this framework can be authenticated from the parsimonious allusions in the Quran, but these invariably have to do with Muhammad's career at Medina. For the Meccan period of his life, the Quran gives us little or no guidance. It is here then that the historian must confront the issue of the historical reliability of the biographical tradition.

Questions

1. What problems arose from the editors' reordering of the Quran?
2. How has it been possible to discover the chronological order of the *sûras*?

Lecture 6:
How to Proceed

Let us review the sources.

For Jesus

There is Mark and the sayings source "Q" and John, and whatever Matthew and Luke have to add. Paul is of little help because he has a different agenda. Everything else, the physical evidence, the apocrypha, the pagan and Jewish sources, all either confirm or expand the primary givens.

For Muhammad

There is first the Quran and then the various strands of the biographical (*sira*) tradition. But since the original form of information on Muhammad was in discrete *tessera* form, it is conceivable that random fragments of the tradition might surface in later, and perhaps much later, works.

In the nineteenth century the pioneer historians in the quest for Jesus and Muhammad devised techniques for testing and judging—that is what *critical* means—the information that can be gleaned from our sources. Two of the mainstays that are pertinent here are 1) text criticism and 2) source criticism.

Text Criticism

The first order of business is to establish exactly what our textual sources say. This begins with the collection of the oldest and best manuscripts of the Gospels and their arrangement into families of dependency. The object of this sorting is the preparation of a critical edition with a base text that presents either the single manuscript that most closely reflects what came from the author's hand (the autograph) or a hybrid or eclectic manuscript that represents the best readings. But in either case, the crucial element is the inclusion of a critical apparatus that provides the reader with what are in each instance the variant or alternative readings to a given word or phrase or sentence in the base text.

The Gospels

The speed of the Gospels' passage into a written text speaks of its birth in a relatively literate Jewish culture whence it passed into a textually sophisticated Hellenic culture. The Gospels were widely copied in the new high-tech format of the codex with its book-like bound edge, as opposed to the older, more expensive and more awkward rolled volumen. Already in the third and fourth century Christian scholars like Origen and Jerome were fussing over the text and there are by now authoritative critical editions of all the Gospels.

The Quran

The Quran began life as a series of discrete oral pronouncements. Its passage into writing is uncertain since the society was profoundly illiterate and the Arabic script as yet unsuited accurately to record speech. Yet the Muslim tradition insists there was a standard written text of the Quran by ca. 650 A.D. Whatever the case, there were variants to our Quran remembered and reported from the

beginning, and yet the written texts of the Quran show a remarkable absence of variants. The "Recitation" started as an oral text and to a degree the recited Qur'an continues to have precedence over the written text.

There is still no critical edition of the Quran as that term is understood in Western scholarly circles; the fact does not bother Muslims, learned or not. Nor does it much bother the historian of Muhammad, though it is of great concern to the historian of the Quran, and of Islam. The current Quranic text is sufficiently stable to provide the Muhammad quest with a fair version of all the information it has to offer.

The *Sira*

Ibn Ishaq's prototype work is no longer preserved, and efforts at reconstructing it have not been encouraging. The text of a great deal of the Arab writing of the era presents the same problem: it comes by the process the Greek academics called *apo phones,* viva voce. The voice was the lecturer's—the books were frequently in a lecture or performance setting—but the scribe, the one who committed it to writing, was one of his students or disciples.

Source Criticism

The issue here is source criticism of the text, not the man. It is legitimate to ask where Jesus or Muhammad got his information, but in this instance, it is the texts we are querying, the Gospels, the Quran, the *Sira.*

The Gospels

Nineteenth-century scholars managed to isolate, from identical passages in Matthew and Luke, a source that lay behind both Gospels. We can speculate that Mark too had a similar collection to work with when he composed his Gospel. A more difficult question is whether the author of Mark was the one who originated the narrative of Jesus or whether there was some primitive story already at hand. What makes this plausible is the fact that the Acts of the Apostles, the earliest account of the post-Jesus community from the same author of the 80–90s Gospel of Luke, shows Peter and others out on the streets of Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' death telling a version of the Jesus story. A Jesus narrative may indeed have been an essential ingredient in the preaching of the new faith.

In the matter of John, it is thought that a particular kind of source lay behind his Gospel, namely a collection of the miracles or wonders performed by Jesus. Mark may have had one too but it is particularly transparent in John, who has a different set of miracles than that found in the Synoptics and consistently calls them by a different name. What are in the Synoptics "wonders" or "deeds of power" become in John *semeia* or "signs." Hence the strong possibility that John was working from what is now called a *semeia* source. And it seems equally likely that John too had available some form of a Jesus sayings collection or sayings source, but whereas the Synoptics simply embedded Jesus' sayings in the surrounding narrative, John transformed them into discourses that become a kind of commentary on the original saying.

The Quran

There is no source criticism here. We can try to take it apart to find its original components or units, but they are all from the same source, Muhammad.

There is no indication that the Quran was based on prior existing parts. It seems to be entirely unique, entirely original. Nothing, of course, is entirely original, and so this judgment may spring from our ignorance of Muhammad's religious environment and even of the religious past of Western Arabia.

The *Sira*

Arab historians tend to name sources for their information and not for their larger work as a whole. And those sources are almost always individuals rather than books or documents. In the case of information about the Prophet, individual authority rests chiefly upon proximity to the Prophet. It is not a coincidence that an enormous amount of the transmitted information regarding Muhammad goes back to his wife Aisha.

So if Aisha or some other contemporary—the eyewitnesses called collectively the "Companions of the Prophet"—stand at the far end of Ibn Ishaq's chain of authorities, who stands at its near end? In many cases it is someone called al-Zuhri, a slightly older historian, and Zuhri leads us back to someone named Urwa, whose lifetime stretched back to Muhammad's younger contemporaries.

The Raids

It is not clear whether the biographical information reached Ibn Ishaq in written or oral form, but both Urwa and al-Zuhri are credited with written works that we no longer possess. But in both instances they are called "The Raids," which we know from later examples were collections of stories about the heroics of Muhammad and his troopers as they ranged from Medina across the Arabian countryside from 624 until the Prophet's death in 632.

What seems to emerge is that the primary biographical interest in Muhammad had to do with his and his companions' derring-do at Medina and was little different from what had always interested their contemporaries and ancestors.

Tellers of Tales

It was apparently Ibn Ishaq who in the mid-eighth century integrated "The Raids" into a more genuinely biographical narrative. There was a broad tradition of story-telling among the pre-Islamic Arabs and the earliest Muslims contrived "Tales of the Prophets," vivid, and highly legendary, stories whose objective was as much entertainment as instruction. Such stories were probably already current in Muhammad's day, since they are sprinkled throughout the Quran, edited down and redirected to make the Quran's own point: not heeding God's prophets can lead to serious consequences.

Ibn Ishaq combined the two types of sources, a "Raids" work, probably after the Zuhri model, and the "Tales" genre, whose chief proponent was one Wahb ibn Munabbih, a Yemeni story-collector of al-Zuhri's generation whose specialty was not only Muhammad stories but also "Tales of the Bible." The combination is still visible in Ibn Ishaq's work. The heart of the *Sira*—Ibn Hisham first used the title *Life*—is still Muhammad's Medina "Raids," now prefaced by a collection of anecdotal "tales" from the Meccan era of the Prophet's life, and the whole spread out across, and interspersed with, verses of the Quran, which are now attached to what are remembered, or imagined, as "the occasions of revelation."

Authenticity and Its Criteria

Those are some of the ways in which the historian attacks the text and sources of the documents. Conclusions drawn from the results of this scrutiny certainly color the final judgment about the reliability of those sources, but historians have developed other, more specific techniques for judging the authenticity of the information: multiple attestation, embarrassment, discontinuity, and coherence or consistency.

Multiple Attestation

A piece of information is likely to be true if it is attested to across a range of independent sources. In the matter of Jesus, across Mark, Q, John, and Paul. There is a problem here with the sources on Muhammad. The only truly independent source is the Quran; the authors/editors of the *Sira* had the Quran before them. And it is these latter who supply the historical context, what critics call the *Sitz im Leben* or "life circumstance" for many of its verses. Where multiple attestation is more useful, however, is in authenticating the various "Prophetic reports," the *hadîth* building blocks out of which the *Sira* narratives have been composed. What is involved here is untangling the complex chain of authorities that are attached to many of them and attempting to discern how many are reported early and independently.

Embarrassment

This may be described as the heightened authenticity granted to information that is seen as embarrassing to the subject or the community of believers; information, in short, that no one would be likely to have invented. Jesus' baptism by John falls into this category, as do the stories of Muhammad participating in the pagan rituals of pre-Islamic Mecca.

Discontinuity

Information is more likely to be true if it cannot be immediately derived from the ambient tradition (for Jesus, contemporary Judaism; for Muhammad, Meccan paganism) or from the subsequent tradition (i.e., the Church, Islam). This is obviously a criterion to be used with some delicacy since its exact opposite, the principle of continuity, functions in the same way. Jesus and Muhammad must both sound like men of their times, Jesus like a first-century Jew and Muhammad like a seventh-century Meccan. What his immediate followers made of him is a useful index as to what Jesus or Muhammad intended in the first place.

Coherence or Consistency

Once the essential message of Jesus or Muhammad has been established, all other information should be more or less consistent with it. "More or less" because consistency is not always the highest virtue of the charismatic.

Questions

1. What do "The Raids" show about the primary biographical interest in Muhammad?
2. What is the "embarrassment" criterion?

Lecture 7:
The Critic at Work

The active careers of Jesus and Muhammad, which in both instances began with the public preaching of a religious message, were undertaken in the early middle age of both men, Jesus when he was "about 30" (Lk. 3:23). Muhammad was likely about the same age, though the Muslim tradition makes him, without good reason, forty. Some at least of their contemporaries began to pay heed to what each man was saying and from that point onward we have firm reports for each. But the Christian and Muslim biographical tradition on their foundational figures was understandably unwilling to pass over in silence all that had gone before in the life of each. Their biographies, the Christians' Gospels, and the Muslim versions of the *Sira* undertook to fill in those thirty-odd years in the life of Jesus and Muhammad in a manner that would both edify and instruct the believers.

Jesus Infancy Narratives

The Gospels of Mark and John, as well as Q, hence all of our independent sources, begin Jesus' biography with Jesus' association with John the Baptist, and more specifically his baptism by John. Matthew and Luke also describe Jesus' baptism by John, but their Gospels do not begin there. Each has a rather prolonged account (Mt. 1:1–2:23; Lk. 1:5–2:52) of Jesus' (and in Luke even John the Baptist's) conception, birth, and, more briefly, his early years. Each has also included a genealogy of Jesus that purports to provide his family tree. The point being made is that Jesus is descended from David, and each genealogy passes through that king and messianic prototype, Matthew's (1:1–16) forward from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Jesus' mother; Luke's (3:23–38) backward from Joseph to Adam.

These chapters, present only in Matthew and Luke, are the so-called "Infancy Narratives" and they immediately raise doubts about their own authenticity and the integrity of the Gospels. We note at the outset that each of the two Jesus genealogies is notoriously different from the other in many details. It is of little matter to the Christian, but they catch the attention of the historian. Undocumented genealogies are not very reliable beyond three generations, though in this case Matthew and Luke could not even agree on Jesus' paternal grandfathers.

Editorial Fingerprints on the Gospels

The ancient manuscript tradition reveals rather clearly that a later hand or hands tacked on an appendix to the Gospels of Mark and John to flesh out, interestingly enough, testimony to the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus. There are other rather obvious examples of later editorial additions, like the rather bold editorial conclusion tacked on to Jesus' remarks on inner versus outer purity (7:19) arguing that Jesus had thereby pronounced all foods clean. And there are internal signs that point to entire passages introduced into the text at some later point. This is almost certainly the case in what have been called the "Infancy Narratives." Modern scholarship, even of the most traditional kind, has its doubts as to whether the Infancy Narratives in

the opening chapter of Matthew's (1:1–2:23) and Luke's (1:5–2:52) Gospels were part of the original Good News of Jesus Christ, a doubt shared here.

Doubts of Authenticity

The grounds for doubting the authenticity of the stories of Jesus' life before his public ministry are all internal to the two Gospels and are, generally speaking, the tendentiousness of the enterprise and the incoherence of the manner in which it is achieved. Tendentious means that a text is being driven by some unacknowledged motive or agenda. Here in both Infancy Narratives, the first unacknowledged intent is to make the case that Jesus, who is elsewhere referred to exclusively as "Jesus of Nazareth," was really "Jesus of Bethlehem"; that is, he was born in David's native city and hence a true scion of that royal messianic line. Indeed, John's Gospel tells us that Jesus' messianic claim was mocked precisely because he was not from Bethlehem.

Jesus of Bethlehem

To achieve this counterintuitive objective each author has to resort to extraordinary means. Matthew opens his account with Joseph and Mary already living in Bethlehem, where Jesus is born (Mt. 2:1), but then has to resort to a series of angel-inspired dreams to move the family first to Egypt and then to Nazareth in Galilee.

Luke, on the other hand, seems to concede that Nazareth was indeed the original home of Mary and Joseph and so has the problem of getting them from there to Bethlehem. To do so he entangles himself in some highly implausible *realia*. "In those days," he begins, "a decree was issued by the Emperor Augustus for a census to be taken throughout the Roman world. This was the first registration of its kind; and took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone made his way to his own town to be registered" (Luke 2:1–3). "In those days" would presumably be before or about Herod's death in 4 B.C. But Roman history knows of no such empire-wide census and nothing of the unusual procedure of making people return to where they used to live. But it is difficult to believe that the editor, who doubtless lived in the Roman Empire, would simply have so flagrantly invented an empire-wide census. It is more likely that either he or we have misunderstood the intended historical marker.

Recognitions

But there is far more at work here than getting Jesus from what is, on all the other evidence, his native village of Nazareth—he is invariably referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth," never as "Jesus of Bethlehem"—to the Davidic, and hence messianic town of Bethlehem. Another motive is at work in the Infancy accounts, namely that Jesus did not become the Messiah, which is a conclusion that might be readily drawn from reading the other Gospels, or even from Matthew and Luke once past the Infancy Narratives. There Jesus receives his messianic validation immediately after his universally attested baptism by John. The Infancy Narratives would push that moment back to Jesus' birth, when angels proclaim his divine status and it is recognized in one form or another by Herod, by the Magi from the East, and the shepherds in the Bethlehem fields.[1] In fact, it is Jesus' "Coming Out," his Epiphany, that is celebrated with great pomp by Eastern Christians on January 6, rather than his birth on December 25.[2]

The Virginal Conception

Embedded in both Infancy Narratives are other powerful motives. Each puts forward the claim of Jesus' virginal conception, the assertion that he was not the offspring of sexual union.[3] He was certainly born to Mary, all agree, a maiden betrothed to a certain Joseph. In both accounts she is discovered to be pregnant. It happened "through the Holy Spirit" according to Matthew (1:20). Luke is somewhat more forthcoming. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," the angel tells Mary, "and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35).

This is an extraordinary turn of events, because nowhere else in the Gospels or in Paul is Jesus' virginal conception mentioned or even alluded to. The likely motive behind it appears in Matthew immediately after we are told of this miraculous conception. "All of this happened in order to fulfill what was said through the prophets . . ." (Mt. 1:22). The prophet in question is Isaiah (7:7) and the apparently messianic prophecy begins "A virgin (or a young girl) shall conceive and bear a son . . ." What is remarkable is that Jesus' early followers understood it to mean that she was still a virgin after the conception.

Pertinent to our purpose is the possibility that biblical prophecy is driving—read creating—events in the life of Jesus. The fulfillment of prophecy is in fact invoked on five different occasions in Matthew's Infancy Narrative to explain an event. The stories that occur in Matthew's Infancy Narratives must all have been in early and wide circulation in Christian circles, and here Matthew or his editor has integrated them into a single, somewhat disjointed tale held together by the formulaic "this happened to fulfill what was said through the prophets."

John the Baptist

The Infancy Narrative in Luke represents a somewhat different point of view. Whereas Joseph had been the prime mover of the action in Matthew, here it is Mary. Luke's version in fact opens with a long and circumstantial treatment (1:5–80) of the (almost as miraculous) conception of John the Baptist on the part of the elderly priest Zechariah and his equally aged, and barren, wife Elizabeth, who, we are told, was Mary's cousin. And when the pregnant Mary visits the now pregnant Elizabeth, John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb in joyful recognition of his Lord.

The Nativity

The Lukan story of Jesus' own birth and earliest years fills the entire second chapter of that Gospel. Mary (and the reader) was earlier informed of her imminent pregnancy by an angel (1:26–38)—in Matthew. Joseph (and the reader) learns she is already pregnant—and now occurs the census that forces Joseph and Mary to take the road to Bethlehem. "While they were there the time came for her to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn" (2:7). Matthew, who spends a good deal of time explaining Mary's pregnancy, has none of this detail. He says simply, "Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Herod" (2:1). This part of the narrative concludes with the story of how angels told local shepherds of the birth and hymned the new Messiah from the heavens (2:8–18).

In the Temple

There follows a brief mention of Jesus' circumcision and naming (2:21) and a somewhat longer account of the prescribed purification of the mother after childbirth (Leviticus 12:2–4) and the traditional ritual of the buy-back of a first-born Israelite male in the Temple (2:22–24; cf. Exodus 13:1–2, 13).

Two More Recognition Stories

This account of these rituals leads into two further recognition stories, both set in the Temple precincts. One is by Simeon, a charismatic—"the Holy Spirit was upon him"—who had been told from on high that he would live to see the Messiah. "This is," Simeon hymns, "a light that will bring revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel" (2:32). Another figure enters the narrative, Anna, an elderly widow and "prophetess" (2:36). She too recognizes the infant as one for whom "all were looking for the liberation of Jerusalem."

Bar Mitzvah

The final episode in Luke's Infancy Narrative is a disconnected piece about the twelve-year-old Jesus. He is accidentally left behind in Jerusalem when Joseph and Mary are visiting the city to celebrate Passover. They return to find him in the Temple engaged in a discussion with the astonished sages there. "Didn't you know," he asks his worried parents, "that I was bound to be in my Father's house?" (2:49). The narrative ends with Jesus returning to Nazareth, while "his mother treasured all these things in her heart."

The historian would like to know where these intimate stories of Jesus' infancy and boyhood originated. Herod's murderous pogrom and the Magi are probably folk tales based on we know not what actual incidents. But Joseph's dreams and private memories could have been provided by Mary, and the Lukan version rather clearly suggests that it was Jesus' mother who was the one who provided at least some of the memories.

The Early Years of Muhammad

The biographical tradition on Muhammad opens with a familiar theme, an "annunciation," from on high, this one reported on the authority of its recipient, the Prophet's mother Amina.

When we turn from the Gospels to the *Sira* tradition on the birth and early years of Muhammad we find ourselves on a similar narrative landscape filled with many of the same motifs in the Infancy Narratives. But whereas we can trace many of these latter themes to their Scriptural prototypes, the folkloric background of the *Sira* (and of the Quran) has disappeared in the wreckage of "The Barbarism," as the Muslims called their pre-Islamic past.

"The Men Who Have the Elephant"

"The year of the elephant" was not an uncommon way of dating an event. The reference, the Muslim historians tell us, is to an attack on Mecca by a Yemeni army that had a war elephant among its weapons. It was led by one Abraha, the Ethiopian viceroy in the Yemen, a Christian who had vile designs on pagan Mecca.

Muhammad's birth was remembered to have occurred in the same year that God, to protect His holy Meccan house, the Ka'ba, miraculously defeated

Abraha's army, whether with smallpox or a lethal avian fly-over. But which year? Many placed it forty years before Muhammad's call to prophecy in 610 A.D., which would date the Prophet's birth in 570 A.D. There is, however, a South Arabian inscription that describes an Abraha-led military engagement east of Mecca that seems to belong to the same campaign. It bears the date in the local era that yields 552 A.D., which places both Abraha and his military foray far too early to be connected to the birth of Muhammad.

An Uncertain Chronology

Ibn Ishaq's confident chronology that places Muhammad's birth on the twelfth day of the Spring month of I Rabi'a in the "Year of the Elephant" is belied not only by the physical evidence but by most of the other information we possess about the life of the Prophet. To begin, not all the authorities date his birth in the so-called "Year of the Elephant." Muhammad, like most of his contemporaries, had little or no idea when he was born and thus of his exact age at his death, and the historians give wildly different figures. Most authorities make him anywhere between sixty and sixty-five years old when he died, a quite advanced age in that culture and quite at odds with the impression given of his vitality and the unexpectedness of his death when it did occur.

How the Arabs Reckoned Time

As it turns out, the reported age of Muhammad was a function not of the memory of his followers, but of a calculation based on another set of considerations. One nonhistorical element in the calculation was the notion that the Prophet should have been at the ideal age of forty when he received his first revelation, and another, less frequently invoked, is that he should not have yet reached the age of responsibility when he took part in a somewhat reprehensible Meccan enterprise, the so-called "Sinful Wars." The consequent calculations have led to numerous anomalies, like obliging his wife Khadija to bear Muhammad eight children after she had passed the age of forty, in a land, as has been remarked, "where there were twenty-two-year-old grandmothers."

Later Muslim authorities must have felt that the historical ground grew firm only at Muhammad's migration to Medina; it was that date, in any event, that they chose to begin the Muslim calendrical era, and from that point to Muhammad's death, all agreed, was a span of ten years.

Presentiments and Prodigies

If we return to Ibn Ishaq's canonical account of the early years of Muhammad, what has been called the "Infancy Gospel of Islam," we find it filled, as it appears, with the same miracles and presentiments of the future as are found in the "Infancy Narratives" of Matthew and Luke:

> Salih ibn Ibrahim . . . said that his tribesmen said that Hassan ibn Thabit said, "I was a well-grown boy of seven or eight, understanding all that I heard, when I heard a Jew calling out at the top of his voice from the top of a fort in Yathrib [that is, Medina]: 'O company of Jews' until they all came together and they called out to him, 'Confound you, what is the matter?' He answered: 'Tonight has risen a star under which Ahmad is to be born.'"
>
> ~Ibn Ishaq 1955:69–70[4]

"Ahmad" is a reference to the Quran (61:6), where Jesus is made to say to the Jews, "I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that was sent before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad." Ahmad, "the praised one," is, in meaning at least, identical to Muhammad.

A foster-mother was found for the newborn, a certain Halima from among the Bedouin tribe of the Banu Sa'd ibn Bakr, and this suckling interval in his life was the setting for some of the more extraordinary stories that grew up around Muhammad, in which he lays claim to the Quranic prophesy regarding "Ahmad":

> Thawr ibn Yazid, from a learned person who I think was Khalid ibn Ma'dan al-Kala'i, told me that some of the Apostle's companions asked him to tell them about himself. He said: "I am what Abraham my father prayed for and the good news of my brother Jesus. When my mother was carrying me she saw a light proceeding from her which showed her the castles of Syria. I was suckled among the Banu Sa'd ibn Bakr, and while I was with a brother of mine behind our tents shepherding our lambs, two men in white raiment came up to me with a gold basin full of snow. Then they seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleaned them. Then one said to the other, 'Weigh him against ten of his people.' They did so and I outweighed them. Then they weighed me against a hundred and then a thousand and I outweighed them. He said, 'Leave him alone, for by God, if you weighed him against all his people, he would outweigh them.'"

The classic biography of the Prophet seems to have been constructed in part at least out of the Quran, that various incidents have been developed to explain or enlarge verses in that Sacred Book. In this instance it was undoubtedly Quran 94:1–3 that is being unpacked, where God is made to say "Did We not open [or expand] your breast and remove from you the burden that galled your back and raised the esteem of you?" The Quran provides no context for the remark, but Muhammad's biographers did. The agents of the act were God's angels and the cleansing was spiritual, though described in physical terms. Where in the Prophet's life it was placed depended on the theological point being made. Placed here, it is Muhammad's Immaculate Conception.

Coming of Age in Mecca

If the stereotypical "recognition" stories in Muhammad's infancy narratives inspire little historical confidence, there appears to be some factual kernel embedded in anecdotes like the following:

> The Apostle lived with his mother Amina daughter of Wahb and his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib in God's care and keeping like a fine plant, God wishing to honor him. When he was six years old his mother Amina died . . . Thus the Apostle was left for his grandfather . . . When the Apostle was eight years of age, eight years after the Year of the Elephant, his grandfather died . . . When Abd al-Muttalib died his son al-Abbas took charge of Zamzam and the watering of the pilgrims,

> though he was the youngest of his father's sons. When Islam came it was still in his hands and the Apostle confirmed his right to it and so it remains in the family of al-Abbas to this day . . . The Apostle lived with his uncle Abu Talib, for (so they allege) the former had confided him to his care because he and Abdullah, the Apostle's father, were brothers of the same mother . . . It was Abu Talib who used to look after the Apostle after the death of his grandfather and he became one of his family.
>
> ~Ibn Ishaq, 1955:73, 78–79

Muhammad was recognized and acknowledged by both the Jews, at the moment of his birth, and later by certain Abyssinian Christians, as God's own Apostle. A similar recognition takes place in a meeting at Mecca with an itinerant fortune-telling pagan seer (Ibn Ishaq, 1955:79), and indeed there are extended passages in the *Life* devoted to this theme (Ibn Ishaq, 1955:90–98).

The Sinful Wars

One of the few events in the history of pre-Islamic Mecca in which the youthful Muhammad was reportedly involved was the so-called "Sinful Wars," which fall somewhat uncertainly in the period of his life before his marriage, reportedly at age twenty-five, to Khadija. Both Ibn Ishaq and Tabari pass quickly over the events of these "wars" in their biographies of the Prophet, but there seems little doubt that the conflict did occur. The issue was a violation, or rather, a series of violations of the "truce of God" during the holy months. Though Muhammad was generally thought to have taken part in one or more of the engagements, the sources were uncertain what he did and, more importantly from the point of dogma, how old he was at the time. The entire business of the "Sinful Wars" was a violation of customary religious law at the time, and Muhammad's participation in it raised serious questions, particularly in what later developed as the doctrine of the Prophet's "impeccability," his freedom from sin even before his Prophetic call.

Marriage to Khadija

The next event in his life is his marriage, traditionally at about the age of twenty-five, to the widow Khadija.

There then occurs in Ibn Ishaq's narrative another recognition scene. Ibn Ishaq's account then continues to describe a transaction that appears to be barter, the exchange of goods for goods, and may represent what actually occurred in Meccan commercial transactions of that era:

> Then the Prophet sold the goods he had brought and bought what he wanted to buy and began the return journey to Mecca. The story goes that at the height of noon, when the heat was intense as he rode his beast, Maysara saw two angels shading the Apostle from the sun's rays. When he [that is, Muhammad] brought Khadija the property, she sold it and it amounted to double or thereabouts. Maysara for his part told her about the two angels [who] shaded him and of the monk's words. Now Khadija was a determined, noble, and intelligent woman possessing the properties with which God willed to honor her. So when Maysara told her these things she sent to the Apostle of God and—so

> the story goes—said: "O son of my uncle I like you because of our relationship and your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness and good character and truthfulness." Then she proposed marriage. Now Khadija was at that time the best born woman in the Quraysh, of the greatest dignity and, the richest as well. All her people were eager to get possession of her wealth if it were possible . . .

The results of this marriage with one of Mecca's more successful entrepreneurs were extremely fortunate for Muhammad, as the Quran itself seems to recognize:

> By the morning brightness, and the night when it is still, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He hate you. And truly, the last is better for you than the first. And truly the Lord will give to you, so that you will be content. Did He not find you an orphan, and He gave you refuge? He found you wandering (*dallan*) and guided you? He found you poor and made you rich . . .
>
> Quran 93:1–8

This reading of the *sûra* did not find much favor among the commentators. As we have seen, its open acknowledgment that Muhammad was once orphaned and poor as well as a pagan ("wandering") were not popular themes among later Muslims. Ibn Ishaq's *Life* makes no mention of the Prophet's poverty during the guardianship of Abd al-Muttalib and Abu Talib, and though it reports the marriage to Khadija, there is no reflection on the riches or even prosperity that followed from it. There was no room in the "legend of Muhammad" for suffering or poverty, and so none for the precise point of 93:8: God found Muhammad poor and made him rich, not by the performance of some miracle but his providential marriage to the wealthy and successful Khadija.

Muhammad the Trader

In the later Arab retelling of the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, a central figure in its commercial life is Hashim, Muhammad's great-grandfather, who reportedly initiated Mecca's career as a trading center. As the story was told, Hashim was granted a trading concession by a Byzantine authority—the sources somewhat implausibly suggest it was by the emperor himself—and thereafter concluded a series of alliances with the Bedouin along the route to Syria. These arrangements enabled Hashim to send annual trading caravans into Byzantine territory and so make the fortune of Mecca.

From this story depends a great deal of what both medieval and modern historians make of the history of Muhammad's Mecca and the origins of Islam. The problem is, it happens not to be true, neither the story nor the conclusions drawn from it. In the eyes of its medieval chroniclers, Mecca was, in the wake of Hashim's commercial innovations, a rich merchant republic, Arabia's premier trading center whence caravans went forth winter and summer, carrying the luxury products of the east, onloaded in the Yemen, to the markets of Byzantine Syria and the Mediterranean. But the Hashim story is, in all its variations, simply an exegetical gloss on the early Sûra 106 of the Quran, which reads in its entirety:

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
For the covenants of security of the Quraysh,
The covenants [covering] the journey [or caravan] of winter and summer.
Let them worship the Lord of this House,
Who provides them with food against hunger and security against fear.

This is the by now standard translation/interpretation of the *sûra*, but the piece is filled with grammatical as well as exegetical difficulties. The first are best solved by connecting this *sûra* with the preceding Sûra 105, which tells of God's miraculous defeat of an invading force from the Yemen, and the resultant unity yields a quite different meaning for the verses of Sûra 106. The "covenants" disappear, replaced by the "easement" of the Quraysh, something which was effected by the defeat of the abortive invasion, and which guaranteed the security of Mecca and so the prosperity that came to the Quraysh not from trading caravans "of winter and summer" but from the two seasonal pilgrimages that centered on Mecca and its environs.

Once the notion of "covenants" or commercial treaties is no longer squeezed out of this *sûra*, the annual Quraysh caravans to Syria and the Yemen disappear, and with them, the entire fable of Hashim the trader and Mecca as a kind of sixth-century Venice-in-the-Hejaz. If there was any trading going in or around Mecca in the sixth century, as there assuredly was, it was probably in raisins and leather, and it inevitably had some connection with the shrine there. And it was in that trade that Muhammad had, thanks to Khadija, a modest share.

Where Do We Stand?

How much of these two accounts is reliable information about the historical Jesus and the historical Muhammad? Not a great deal, it seems. The Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are openly tendentious. They assert, through two contradictory and not very convincing genealogies, that Jesus was a descendent of King David. This might or might not be true, but it is a constitutive element in the Christian brief for Jesus' messiahship and so the information must be regarded at least with suspicion.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, on the other hand, is flatly contradicted by all the other evidence we have on the subject. More, the birthplace assertions, like much else in the Infancy Narratives (and elsewhere in the Gospels), are adduced to demonstrate that Jesus literally fulfilled the messianic prophecies that his followers found in the Bible. Finally, the stories of Jesus' conception elude the categories of history and by such a wide margin that even conservative and traditional critics prefer to address the issue not as a matter of fact but as a *theologoumenon*, a species of theological truth that "prescinds from facticity," but is rather "a notion which supports, enhances or is related to a matter of faith."[5]

Some of the same forces are at work in the opening chapters of Muhammad's biography. There are no biblical prophecies to fulfill—Muhammad's own proof of his prophethood is in effect the Quran, but there are attempts to enlarge and enhance the Quran's meager givens, that the Prophet was an orphan and perhaps suffered poverty until God granted him abundance (Q. 93:6–8).

We throw up our hands on the chronology. We may be assured that Muhammad died in 632 A.D. at Medina, where he had arrived ten years earlier after a forcibly ended career at Mecca. We might add that he was typically a young man when he had earlier married there and that he was equally typically in his maturity when called to prophethood. We can be assured that he was not born in the "Year of the Elephant," an event whose date we can fix in 552 A.D. Even the traditional fixing at 570 A.D., which is arrived at simply by counting back the stereotypical forty years from his call to prophecy, is almost certainly too early for Muhammad's actual year of birth.

There is no reason, on the other hand, to doubt that Muhammad was early on orphaned, and subsequently raised by his paternal grandfather and then his uncle, Abu Talib. We can affirm too that he entered into an arranged marriage with the relatively well-off Khadija, who bore him all his surviving children, all females, and through whom he gained a share in Mecca's modest commercial life. What may be doubted, however, as firmly as they are in Jesus' case, are all the recognition scenes in Muhammad's early life. Both may have been good young men; it is unlikely that either had a light over his head.

---

1. A later, more sentimental generation of Christians added members of the animal kingdom to the choir of worshipers.
2. There is, of course, no historical evidence for the date of Jesus' birth. The celebration of the Infancy on December 25 was decreed by the Christian Emperor Constantine to replace an important imperial holy day, the birthday of the Invincible Sun on the Winter solstice.
3. There is normally some confusion here. Virginal conception has to do with Jesus' conception without benefit of human sexual intercourse. "Virgin birth," which will soon follow as an issue for Christians, has to do with his mother Mary's remaining physically intact, with an unruptured hymen, through the otherwise natural birth of Jesus. The "Immaculate Conception" is a much later development in the Church. It is a declaration that Mary, alone among humankind, was conceived without the very tainted spiritual DNA called Original Sin.
4. All the translations from Ibn Hisham's version of Ibn Ishaq's *Sira* are taken from Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah.* Oxford, 1955, and the page numbers refer to that edition.
5. Fitzmyer, "The Virginal Conception" (1981), p. 45.

Questions

1. How do "Infancy Narratives" about Jesus raise doubts about the integrity of the Gospels?
2. What were the Sinful Wars?

Lecture 8:
Jesus Speaks

Our early sources do not merely describe Jesus; they show him to us in a dramatic context*: we see him acting; we hear him speaking. In our Gospels, Jesus' speech is embedded in a narrative frame that is loose and rudimentary in places and highly detailed in others—in the Passion Narratives, for example. These were, we are given to understand by the authors, the sayings of Jesus. Our modern sensibilities about reported speech—we take to be accurate whatever is enclosed in quotation marks—has turned these sayings, Jesus' *logia*, into his exact words.

Jesus' Words

But we should pause here. Stenography was rare in the ancient world and nonexistent out in the fields or inside the synagogues where Jesus spoke. And it is now clear that ancient historians like Thucydides and Livy composed speeches for the personae in their works and that such speeches can be thought of, in our more trusting moments, as representing the sense of what might actually have been said on a given occasion. But Jesus' words recorded in the Synoptic Gospels are generally not speeches—John's Gospel, of course, has Jesus delivering long discourses that are, as all agree, John's work and not Jesus'; rather, they are aphorisms and parables, all quite memorable and memorizable in that still very oral society. Someone might very well have memorized, and they or others have written down, the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Discovery of Q

In the nineteenth century, once the Gospels began to be printed side by side, it became apparent in the process that there were two hundred thirty-odd verses that were identical in Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark. It had been ascertained that Mark was earlier than either Matthew or Luke and that they had used that earlier Gospel as a source. Thus, it was reasoned, these shared non-Markan verses must represent a distinct second source. This is the Two-Source Hypothesis, and by the end of the nineteenth century this equally hypothetical second source had already begun to take on a kind of life of its own and was being called "Q."

Once that much has become clear, it is possible to go even further and to add to our reconstituted Q those passages that occur in Mark, but are found in an identically different version in Matthew and Luke, like John the Baptist's preaching (Mk. 1:2–6, 78 = Q 3:2, 7–9, 16–17) or Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Mk. 1:1–13 = Q 4:1–13). These might have come from a third source, a 2Q**,** but it is more Ockham-like to think that here too Matthew and Luke were following Q**.**

The Making of Q

On inspection, the Q verses, or, to recognize this source's increasingly realistic existence, the verses of Q, turned out to be somewhat remarkable.

Almost all the Q verses in Matthew and Luke were reported speech or sayings (*logia*); narrative stories of Jesus were minimal. Some of Jesus' bilingual followers, who were not all that uncommon in Jewish Palestine, had apparently collected Jesus' Aramaic sayings in an instantaneous Greek version and committed them to writing. This must have been at about the same time as Mark's Gospel was being composed, or perhaps even earlier—certainly before Matthew and Luke came to be written.

Q and Mark

More recently the emergence of the sayings source Q has introduced another dating criterion at the margins of the Synoptics. Internal evidence leaves little doubt that Mark and the hypothetically constructed Q were both used by Matthew and Luke in writing their Gospels. Mark, on the other hand, shows no signs of knowing Q as we have reconstructed it, nor Q of knowing Mark. Hence, Mark and Q must represent two independent sources for the life of Jesus; indeed, they are our oldest such. But which is the earlier? Formally, it would appear that Q is the earlier since Mark's narrative gospel has apparently taken a collection of Jesus' sayings that are something like Q and embedded it in his Jesus in Galilee section. There they are contained within a primitive narrative framework held together by the simplest possible connectives: "Next," "And then," "Immediately." In the first half of Mark's Gospel Jesus moves randomly from place to place; time passes in indeterminate and indistinct segments. Mark's true literary creation is the Passion Narrative, what is here called Jesus in Jerusalem.

Q seems not only formally more primitive than Mark; it also appears earlier in what has been called its "theologically undeveloped" content: it knows nothing of Jesus' death and his resurrection. It is inconceivable that its compilers knew of such things, particularly the resurrection, and neglected or chose not to mention them. Two other possibilities present themselves, however: that these things never actually happened or that they had not yet happened at the time of the collection. But whatever the reason, the absence of a passion and a resurrection narrative has been taken as an indication of the early date of Q.

The Q Text

Q is now is often printed as a free-standing document. The verses extracted from Matthew and Luke are printed in the order (and with the numbering) found in Luke's Gospel, since it is judged that that Gospel best preserves the original sequence of the collection. The practice will be followed here: the citations of Q are according to the chapters and verses as they occur in Luke's Gospel.

The Q passages begin at Luke 3:7 (= Mt. 3:7), not with Jesus but with John the Baptist's full-throated judgment (3:7–9) against the unrepentant "spawn of Satan." John then turns to the subject of the Messiah who is to come (3:16–17). It is not he, but an unnamed other far more worthy who will be an equally severe judge. Jesus enters rather quietly, and his baptism by John is uncertainly represented in Q (perhaps 3:21–22). When the text first expands fully on Jesus, he is "filled with the Holy Spirit," which guides him into the wilderness, where he undergoes the familiar temptations (4:1–13). There

follows Jesus' preaching from a mountainside, first the Beatitudes and Woes (6:20–26), the Lukan version, then advice to love one's enemies and other moral teachings that are continuous down to the end of Luke's chapter 6. We return to the concrete in the story of the cure of the Roman centurion's servant (7:1–10), which has far more to do with the centurion's faith than with the miraculous cure, which rates barely a line (7:10).

John's disciples reappear at 7:18–20, inquiring on John's behalf whether Jesus is the Expected One. They are told to report back to John what they have witnessed, which is a resume of Jesus' cures and exorcisms (7:22–23), and it is sweeping enough to indicate that behind this spare sayings collection there is an awareness that this preacher was also a wonder-worker. At their departure Jesus delivers an encomium of the Baptist (7:24–28), followed perhaps—the passage may have become displaced—by what is an important programmatic statement: "Up to John you have the Law and the Prophets; since then the Kingdom of God has been proclaimed as the Good News and everyone is struggling to gain entry" (16:6).

The thread of Q resumes in Luke's text (7:31–35) with Jesus' criticism of "this generation," who said of the Baptist that he was possessed and of Jesus himself that he was "a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners." Next (9:57–62) there is Jesus' severe advice to would-be followers, followed by an extended (10:2–12) commission and some rather detailed advice to those Jesus is sending forth with the message: "The Kingdom of God draws near."

At Q 10:13–16 occurs Jesus' fierce damnation of the two Galilean towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida for being unresponsive to the miracles he performed in them, an unusual singling out that points perhaps to the immediate environment of the collection. Jesus' meditation on the fatherhood of God and his own sonship follows (10:1–22). After noting the privilege of his followers in witnessing him (10:23–24), Jesus instructs them in the Lord's Prayers (10:2–4) and the Father's generosity toward those who ask (11:9–13). There is a long passage on exorcism (11:14–26), including a response to those who claim Jesus drives out spirits by the power of Beelzebul.

Jesus then turns to this "wicked generation" that asks for a sign (11:16, 9–32) and offers himself as that sign, as Jonah was to Nineveh, and the "queen of the south" to Solomon. "Note," he says, "here is someone greater than Jonah." Next it is the turn of the Pharisees, who are condemned fiercely and at length for their hypocrisy (11:39–52), and embedded in it is Jesus' reflection on the murderous death of God's prophets and an unmistakable reference to Jesus' own, all of which will be paid for by "this generation," and this same harsh judgment is leveled specifically at Jerusalem (13:34–35).

Luke 12 is mostly Q text and includes amidst its moral teachings—"There's more to living than food and clothing" (12:23)—Jesus' references to himself as the "Son of Man" (12:8, 10) and a prediction that his followers will be persecuted "in the synagogues" and "before the rulers and authorities" (12:11–12). The instruction continues in this vein through most of chapters 13–17 and 19:12–26, now with the liberal use of similes ("The Kingdom of God is like . . .") and parables ("A man was giving a big dinner party and sent out many invitations . . .").

Notable is an aphoristic correction of the Mosaic law on divorce (16:18), which Matthew repeats but attempts to soften (5:32), and a long apocalyptic passage (17:22–37) where Jesus once again refers to himself as the "Son of Man." Q also included Jesus' formal appointment of those—the Twelve?—designated to share at his royal banquet and "be seated on thrones and sit in judgment over the Twelve Tribes of Israel" (22:28–29). In Luke the passage is situated within Jesus' instructions at Jesus' last supper on the evening before his death, but Matthew (19:28) has Jesus saying it even earlier, on his way to Jerusalem and as a response to Peter.

Looking Under the Hood

With Matthew and Luke we are in the enviable position of being able to observe what each did with his Markan source and to surmise why. We note the editorial cutting and expanding, the explanations, and even at times corrections elided into the text of the older Gospel. We can trace the redactional process because we have the sources before us. But in the case of those sources themselves we possess nothing more basic than Mark and Q to enable us to see how they dealt with their source material in shaping their own texts. In Mark we have that text, of course; in the case of Q we are assuming that our reconstruction was not a mere assemblage but was in fact a deliberate literary composition.

What Is Q?

There is little doubt that Q represents an early view of Jesus and one that is strikingly different from the portrait of Jesus presented in the Gospels, and even in the earliest of them, the Gospel of Mark. What then is this Q thing we have contrived for ourselves? And, if it really existed, as seems almost certain, who composed/collected the sayings in it, and to what end? If they were authentic early followers of the authentic Jesus, why did they make no mention of his crucifixion and resurrection? In the minds of some, Q was not only a collection; it was a genuine (written) literary work, a composition, and, what is more, it was, like its sibling, the "Gospel of Thomas," a gospel, in fact, the original form of the "Good News." Q, it is now held by some, represents the authentic Good News of the authentic Jesus.

Was Q a Gospel?

Q may indeed have been a "Gospel" in the original sense of that word. Jesus seems to have used the "Good News" as a specific denomination of his message, which is summed up in our Gospels as "Repent. The Kingdom of God draws near," but which obviously also encompasses Jesus' teachings recorded in those Gospels. The Christians changed the meaning of the word, however. As the Acts of the Apostles describe and as our Gospels illustrate, the "Good News" they preached from the outset was in part from Jesus, but more substantially, it was about Jesus. And in its most profound sense, as in Paul, for example, Jesus was the Good News. None of those two latter senses are visible in the reconstituted Q, and indeed, the two events that make Jesus more than merely a teacher, his death and resurrection, are not even mentioned in Q.

Q and Jesus

We have now moved far beyond mere chronology to fundamental judgments about the person and mission of Jesus. If, as some think, Q, bolstered and complemented by that other sayings source called the Gospel of Thomas, really does represent the authentic Good News about the authentic Jesus, then the authentic, original Jesus was nothing more than a Galilean preacher-teacher, perhaps on the Cynic sage model, or a radical peasant upstart. On this latter view, Jesus was radical and troublesome enough to bring on his own death: Jesus, like John the Baptist, died not for the sins of mankind but for his own intemperate remarks.

Q and the Death of Jesus

As already remarked, Q seems unaware, or perhaps merely uncaring, about Jesus' death. The solution to this odd disconnect between Q and the canonical Gospels may lie in the Q verses (= Lk. 11:47–51) and Jesus' wrathful remarks on the death of the prophets and what appear to be a presentiment of his own death at the hands of "this generation." Jesus' death may, then, have been known to this earliest group of his followers who collected and treasured his teachings. But if so, it represented not the redemptive death so solemnly signaled by Paul, a death that was in turn illuminated by the resurrection that followed. It is, then, not so much the death of Jesus that is missing from Q as his missing resurrection.

Q as a Literary Work

There are of course other problems with regarding this hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings as a finished literary work, questions that arise from both the composition as such and the Jesus that it presents to us. To begin with, Q has left no literary trace whatsoever apart from its phantom footsteps in Matthew and Luke. That argument from silence is not fatal, perhaps, but the Jesus query remains unanswered. Why does Q sound so different from Paul, who is after all our earliest preserved source on Jesus? Why would the author(s) of such a work have omitted both the death and the resurrection of Jesus? Was it because they never occurred? Many modern critics might be willing to embrace that conclusion regarding the resurrection of Jesus, but the evidence for his death by Roman execution seems incontrovertible. What is more often proposed is that the compositors of Q knew of Jesus' crucifixion, but chose not to mention it.

One current explanation of the genesis of Q is that its collectors were engaged in the preparation of either a catechism for the instruction of Jesus' early followers or, more likely, a proselytizing document. Q, it is argued, was what we might call a "teaser" or "recruitment brochure," that is, a collection of Jesus' sayings designed to introduce the prospective convert to Jesus the teacher without the more "difficult" message of 1) Jesus' messiahship, or 2) the theology of a redemptive death, or, we might add, 3) the promise of immortality guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection from the grave.

Not all of this can be true. There is no single motive that explains the composition of Q. Some critics claim that Q is itself a composite document, that the original core of sayings—now dubbed "Q1"—underwent perhaps two subsequent redactions in which the portrait of Jesus was altered.

Redaction criticism on Q is based on the same principle that has been applied to Mark: the presence of internal signs that point to authorial or editorial intent: the arrangement of the material and whether the compositional units into which the material has been arranged betrays an argument that is being proposed or a case that is being made.

The Themes of Q and of Jesus

On that basis the Jesus of Q, who is closely linked to John the Baptist, is presented as emphasizing three major themes. The first is that of the coming Judgment, the same *leitmotif* that dominates Synoptic Gospels. Part of that judgment is the divine vengeance visited upon Sodom for its treatment of Lot; the same will fall upon Chorazin and Bethsaida and even Jerusalem for their treatment of the prophetic Jesus. Finally, there is the powerful theme that runs through the Deuteronomistic books of the Bible from Deuteronomy through Kings, that of "a cycle of sinfulness, prophetic calls to repentance which are ignored, punishment by God followed by renewed calls to repentance with threats of judgment."

When, Where, Who?

The collection and editorial arrangement of these Jesus *logia* was done on the basis of its geographical references and local knowledge, in Jesus' home territory of Lower Galilee. And early on. On the face of it, Q was composed before the full impact of the atonement and redemption theology that is so prominent in Paul is felt among Jesus' followers. Q may in fact have been put together by Jesus' Galilean followers in the 30s, immediately in the wake of Jesus' death.

The Jesus in Q

There have been attempts to peer more closely into the text of Q to find there the lineaments of the Jesus movement as it existed in that Galilean milieu in Jesus' lifetime and immediately after. "Itinerants," "charismatics," "radicals," and "pacifists" have all been found in and between the lines of Q, all with a distinct impulse toward proselytizing among their fellow Jews.

At some point, perhaps with the appearance of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' followers stopped using Q and turned to the full Gospels. The text of Q survived long enough for Matthew and Luke to use it for their own theological purposes. Other groups, like the sectarians who cherished their own Q, called the "Gospel of Thomas," may have circulated it for a spell. But Q did not survive as a separate and free-standing testimony to Jesus. Jesus, it turned out for his followers, was something more than an itinerant Galilean preacher.

*But not our earliest extant source. Paul's letters are exhortatory and instructive rather than narrative or dramatic. But the Jesus events clearly lie behind them, most obviously in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7.

LECTURE EIGHT

Questions

1. How is Q "theologically undeveloped"?
2. How is the Jesus of Q different from the Jesus presented in the Gospels?

Lecture 9:
Muhammad Speaks, or Sings

The Muslims' Q is fortuitously named "Quran." The Arabic word means "recitation" and it is a name that the work applies to itself (Q. 10:15 and so on; an "Arabic Quran," 39: 28: 41:3, and so on). The collected Quran began as an individual oral recitation on the part of Muhammad and it continues to live today not only as a printed book, but also as an ongoing recitation. Quran recitation is one of the most esteemed works of Muslim piety.

Q and Quran

The Christians' Q and the Muslims' Quran are collections of the pronouncements of the charismatic and sanctified individuals who stand at the head of worldwide communities of believers who affirm that these were in fact the words of God. The pronouncements recorded in each began as oral performances delivered to audiences who could scarcely have imagined the consequences of what they were hearing. The *logia* in Q passed into the narrative Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and Q passed out of existence as an independent work, if it was such. The Quran's recitations, on the other hand, seem to have achieved the status of Scripture from the outset.

The first voice that is heard in Q is that of John the Baptist (= Lk. 3:7): "So John used to say to the crowds who came out to hear him . . . 'You spawn of Satan!'" Jesus enters only in the wake of John, abruptly and without introduction (= Lk. 1:4). If we attempt to open the Quran at its beginning, we cannot find it. As already remarked, whoever assembled the *logia* in the Quran combined many of them and then arranged the new units, the *sûras*, in an order that is difficult to fathom.

Muhammad: Prophet and Poet

Nowhere does the Quran introduce Muhammad and neither it nor our biographical texts provide any preliminary discourse whereby the Prophet explains his extraordinary experience of revelation and what it was he was about to recite. On the evidence of what are judged to be the earliest Meccan *sûras*, Muhammad spoke from the outset like a prophet (in the broadest sense of someone pronouncing on behalf of God). We can only speculate about how Muhammad's mission began, how he presented himself, or how he was understood by the first Meccans who heard this familiar man, now in his full maturity, raise his voice in this new fashion. And since there is no sign that at the very outset he attempted to explain his calling and its consequences, we can only conclude that he was identified as something already familiar to the Meccans' experience.

Scattered through the early *sûras*, and echoed and amplified in the biographical tradition, are allegations that Muhammad was someone unusual but familiar, a poet or a seer. There was something about the style of his utterances, and perhaps his personal demeanor, that reminded them of a well-known type, a public crier possessed by a higher force. Muhammad spent considerable time thereafter attempting to correct this impression, which he

eventually did, but it was his reputation as a charismatic bard that first seized the attention of the Meccans and got him his first hearing.

Both the characterization as bard and the style of those early *sûras* draw our attention to what Muhammad was about. But in the original setting he was not writing but speaking, singing, or chanting. Thanks to the analysis of the Homeric epic and its parallels, we know a good deal about such bardic singers, who composed as they declaimed.

Revelation As Oral Composition

The early Meccan *sûras*, closer to being original units of composition than the longer *sûras* that follow, betray all the indices of oral composition: a notable, even insistent, rhyme scheme; intense rhythmic patterns; short *stichoi*, and recurrent formulaic themes. More, the putative *Sitz im Leben* of those *sûras* corresponds to the circumstances of oral composition: first, a society of mixed orality-literacy where oral composition was still the standard form of expression. The circumstances of preaching point in the same direction: the Meccan *sûras* constituted a message for the society as a whole delivered to a public audience.

There are other clues to a live preaching setting for the Meccan *sûras*. There are passages in the Quran, like the Judgment scenes in *Sûra* 37 (50–61) and *Sûra* 50 (20–26), that are difficult to follow unless we imagine them as performances, where gesture and verbal intonation alone make clear who is speaking to whom. One conclusion from this is that we are here in the presence of an oral recitation, which no one doubts, but the logic may lead to a more profound, and radical, conclusion: that Muhammad belonged to a tradition of oral poetry and so was composing as well as declaiming.

As with the other oral bards who have been studied, it is difficult to imagine that Muhammad's "songs" were not declaimed more than once, and somewhat differently on each occasion. Thus many of our preserved Meccan *sûras* might have caught one "performance" of the revelation. That is not, however, the impression we are given in our version of the Quran. There we are clearly dealing with a fixed text, and that fixing must have taken place early on. We are thus confronted with an essential difference between Muhammad and the oral bard: some at least of Muhammad's audience went away with the conviction that they had heard the words not of an entertainer but of God.

The Objective

The objective of the Meccan *sûras* was a change in worship from polytheism to strict monotheism, and the method chosen for its achievement was preaching. The Meccan *sûras* constituted a message for the society as a whole and delivered to a public audience. But this particular preaching was neither spoken nor read; it was "recited," that is, cantillated in a manner and form that immediately identified the performer to his audience as either a *kahin*, a "seer," or a "poet." The Quranic recitations had a style sensibly removed from ordinary speech, language, and behavior. And there must have been gestures: many of the dramatic presentations of the Judgment would be unintelligible without identifying gestures or changes in vocal register.

The Poet and the Performer

All we know about poets and poetry in an oral society indicates that the "recitation"/performance was rarely completely improvised, that the poet crafted his work in private before performing in public. We may even have been given an oblique glance of Muhammad at work (with God!) in *Sûra* 73 (1–8, with a later insertion at 3–4). But what the poet finally did perform in public was not entirely what he had composed in private: oral poetry of all types gives indications of responding to audience reaction as it unfolds.

There are on-the-spot explanations—introduced by "What will make you understand . . . ?"—that are obviously cued by audience reaction (101:9–11), or in these instances, perhaps a lack of it. There are direct answers to both questions and criticisms (2:135, and so on). And there was, finally, the charge that the "revelations" were somewhat too improvised, that Muhammad was in effect making it up as he went along. Not all of these responses had necessarily to occur in the original performance, however, since these performances were certainly and, in the case of the Quran, necessarily, repeated, and there was an opportunity for the poet, or the prophet, to make adjustments.

The Revelations Memorized

The Quran does not tell us much about the Muslims' repetitions of it. Its instructions on the recitation of the Quran are directed at Muhammad—"Repeat it slowly and clearly," he is told from on high (75:16)—and not to the Meccan Muslims, even though these latter understandably applied that to themselves. But what does seem certain is that the Quran was memorized from very early on and likely in some sort of liturgical setting, though obviously not in the same one in which Muhammad originally recited it: The Muslims were repeating what was now a text. They were, it appears, worshipers who used as a form of worship those recitations that had been prophetic utterance in the mouth of Muhammad but were now sacramentalized.

If this supposition is correct, we must also imagine Muhammad guiding the memorization process. It was he who had to choose out of his multiple performances of a given *sûra* the version that would become liturgical. If Muhammad shaped or composed his revelations into his recitations, the range of variations would be narrower than if he had simply improvised, that is, delivered as they were being revealed to him. But there would still be choices, and in this fundamental sense, Muhammad was the first editor of the Quran.

"The Recitation" was thus taken up not by professional *râwis*, the trained transmitters of poetical texts, but by the "Submitters," the simple believers who possessed neither the license nor the professional skill to reperform this particular text. We can only imagine them repeating the recitations with Muhammad, or better, after Muhammad, and with his guidance.

The memorization itself must not have been difficult in the still oral society of Mecca. The same techniques that aid the poet in his composition—rhyme and rhythm and formulaic diction—helped the believers in their memorization. And nothing, apparently, was edited out. All the original dialogue directed by God to Muhammad was faithfully repeated. They were not imitating the Prophet; they were repeating the Words of God.

Poet or Prophet? Or Both?

Medieval and modern distinctions between the style of the poet and the seer, and between them and the Quran, are somewhat beside the point. Muhammad's audience knew far more about such things than we, and they certainly thought he filled the bill. It took no great sophistication to recognize him as a poet: what was proceeding from his lips was poetry by any standard. And his performance behavior too may likewise have identified him as a poet. And his listeners drew the appropriate conclusion, that these were "old stories" (25:4) and that he must have gotten his poetry from someone else, and even that what he was "reciting" had been "recited" or "passed on"—this is not the same word as that referring to the Quran—to him (25:5–6).

A Singer of Tales

Let it be conceded that Muhammad was composing within a fixed idiom. Was he also composing within a fixed tradition? Was he working new variations on traditional themes? By his own lights, Muhammad was absolutely original: his message was God's, not his own, and no one else in that place or era was doing what he did. But to some, he was simply repeating old themes, "tales of the ancients" (25:5); for us, who know more about oral poetry, he was a "singer of tales." If the characterization is true, then Muhammad fits comfortably into the tradition of the oral bard, a skilled artist redoing familiar themes in a familiar, though difficult, style.

Muhammad denied the charge, and we must agree: the themes of his "recitation" are nothing like the stereotyped ones that appear in contemporary poets. One of the chief thematic settings of the Quran is in fact a biblical one of prophets and prophecy. And judging from the audience response as reflected in the Quran itself, the biblical themes were comprehensible, if not always entirely familiar to the Meccans who were hearing about those matters, and apparently not for the first time.

Muhammad's Sources

The Muslim insists that the Quran is not from Muhammad, but from God. So where did the Prophet's apparently pagan audience receive an understanding that matched his own? The pre-Islamic poets may have had some notion of biblical ideas, but they certainly knew nothing of the biblical stories with which Muhammad and his audience were seemingly familiar. Even a cursory look at the Bible and Gospel material mentioned in the Quran reveals that its author had not been exposed directly or indirectly to Scripture, but rather in some fashion or another to what the Jews called *midrash*, the retelling of the contents of Scripture, often embellished with extraneous details for the enlightenment, edification, or entertainment of the audience.

The same is true of the Gospel material in the Muslim Scripture. The Quran's stories of Jesus and Mary, again allusively told or referred to, find their immediate parallels in the apocryphal Gospels and not in the canonical texts. We know less about the apocrypha than we do about the Jewish *midrashim*, but the accounts of Jesus in the Quran have some distinctly marginal as well as legendary elements. In the Quran, Jesus is said not to have died on the cross, but "there was a similarity to him" (4:156–159), a substitute victim. The way

Muslims read the Quran, Jesus, the human prophet, is now on high with God (3:55) and will return to suffer his mortal death at the End Time.

Story and Story-Telling

The first purpose of the Prophet's intent is rather obvious, to gain the attention of his audience. The striking introductory oath clusters clearly were directed toward this end, and the eschatological *mis en scène* beginning "And when . . ." had much the same purpose. The eschatological passages have another function: they begin to shape the listeners' behavior and consciences to the new morality, particularly when the depictions of the rewards and punishments of the Afterlife were accompanied by vivid depictions of what led the denizens of Paradise and Gehenna to their respective fates.

As the revelations unfold, so too does the scope of instruction. Examples taken from sacred history gradually replace the eschatological threats and promises. Biblical and Arabian examples of divine retribution, not so much against immorality as against disbelief, are put before the listeners, at first allusively and then in more detail as salvation stories.

Identifying Muhammad

His poetry and his story-telling made Muhammad culturally identifiable to his contemporaries. What made him odd, what made him a prophet, was a great moral earnestness and conviction. Muhammad's spiritual sensibilities and aspirations, on display in the Quran, flowed from a West Arabian religious environment that we imperfectly understand and which may be tentatively described as biblical monotheism. We know its likely foundation was the Bible and (perhaps to a lesser extent) the New Testament, two texts to which Muhammad did not have access. We know it too from its textual manifestations in seventh-century rabbinic Judaism and that same century's versions of Eastern Christianity. But neither of those are adequate to our purpose. What we require, if we are to understand the religious *Sitz im Leben*, is some testimony to seventh-century Arabian Judaism and seventh-century Arabian Christianity or, even more precisely, to the version of each that was available in Mecca in the second decade of the century.

The Mantic Seer

Muhammad baffled his contemporaries. Though their familiar Muhammad was playing, or better, performing, the poet, they knew that he had never been trained as such, that he was not a member of the guild. Muhammad, they thought, must be a *jinn*-possessed or *jinn*-inspired poet (21:5, and so on), or perhaps a mantic *kahin* or seer (52:29; 69:42). They have the testimony of their eyes and ears, and for us the impression is reinforced by what seem to be some early Muslim traditions about the Prophet. They relate that Muhammad told his wife Khadija à propos of his revelations, "I see light and hear a voice. I fear I am becoming a *kahin*." The accounts make Muhammad out so fearful of a demonic experience that he contemplated suicide (again, another unlikely invention by a pious Muslim tradition).

The seer and the poet both provided access to what the Arabs called *al-ghayb,* the "unseen world." Each was a familiar of the *jinn*, the *daimones* or *genii* of the Arabian spirit world, and both were, on occasion, *jinn*-struck (*majnun*). To the poet the *jinn* gave the skill to tell the tribal tales of bravery in war

or sorrow in love; the poet was the memory and panegyrist of the tribe, the "archive of the Arabs." The *kahin* had somewhat more practical skills. His special knowledge made him a tribal counselor and arbitrator in matters great and small. Both were known from their speech, the rhymed prose (*saj´*) of the seer and the more poetically elaborate ode of the poet.

The Quran bears little resemblance to the highly formalized metrics of the ancient Arabic ode, but does it show the characteristics of the *kahin's saj´*? The subsequent Muslim literary tradition says "No," as indeed it must since to grant that the Quran is a form of *saj´* is to concede in effect that Muhammad was a *kahin* as charged. More, those same critics were careful to so define *saj´* that the Quran's diction could not possibly qualify as such. Yet, if the definition is left broadly open as rhymed coda with a loose metrical structure and a penchant for opacity or enigma, the Quran fits comfortably into the paradigm. But only for a time. At Medina the reluctant *kahin* began to disappear behind the Prophet's new role as preacher.

But not before Muhammad's identification as a *kahin* changed his life and the course of human history. In 622 CE, after twelve years of "reciting" his message on the streets and in the markets of Mecca, and when the Meccan authorities were making efforts to assassinate him, Muhammad migrated—his famous *hijra* or *Hegira*—to the oasis of Medina at the invitation of the people there. The Medinese were in the grip of a civil war and they thought that this Meccan, whom we would regard at this stage as simply a troublesome and trouble-making God-crier, was the one to solve their political and social problems. The invitation to Medina is odd, however, only if we are persuaded, as the Muslim tradition would persuade us, that there is no conceivable way that Muhammad could be confused with a *kahin*. The phrase "Envoy of God" may have had one sound in the Prophet's ears, but it assuredly had quite another in the Medinans'. They spelled "prophet" with a "k."

We are as baffled by Muhammad and the Quran as the seventh-century Meccans who first heard it from Muhammad's lips. We do not know where this minor merchant of Mecca learned to make poetry. For the Muslim tradition there was necessarily no issue here and so it offered no explanation; both the content and the diction of the Quran, its language, style, and very tropes were from God. Hence, the Muslims quite correctly concluded, the Quran itself is a miracle and so is literally and literarily inimitable. Muhammad (or God speaking through him) claimed as much in response to his critics: let them try to produce *sûras* like it (2:23, and so on). And, if a miracle is an event with no natural causes, then the Quran is indeed a miracle. Whether it was the "fine magic of the language" that brought it to pass, as one early nineteenth-century critic thought, or simply an act of God, there was no sensible way by which an untrained Meccan could have produced such sophisticated verse as we find in the Quran.

Questions

1. What was the objective of the Meccan *sûras*?
2. How did Muhammad baffle his contemporaries?

Lecture 10:
The Message:
Jesus in Galilee

Neither Q nor Paul's letters tell us much about the events of Jesus' life. So for a more complete view we must turn to the narrative Gospels, Mark in the first instance and whatever Matthew, Luke, and John can add.

The Shape of the Gospels

Structurally, the narrative Gospels, and the three Synoptics in particular, seem to fall into two parts called here "Jesus in Galilee" and "Jesus in Jerusalem." They are preceded by other matter, notably the already described "Infancy Narratives" in Matthew and Luke, and in John by a theological prologue on Jesus as the eternal Word of God. There is also a relatively brief epilogue covering the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and his reported appearances after his resurrection from the dead.

These two sections, "Jesus in Galilee" and "Jesus in Jerusalem," are developed quite differently. After the Baptist connection is explained and the Twelve chosen, the rest of Act One of the Gospels consists of Jesus' teaching or preaching, most of which is provided with some kind of simple setting of time and place. These are combined into larger discourse units that seem to move forward in somewhat arbitrary chronological order. Interspersed in them are accounts of the wonders performed by Jesus, mostly cures and exorcisms, as well as his arguments and disagreements with various competing Jewish groups. It all plays out in a Galilean landscape over the course of what seems barely a year, though in John's version, Jesus' active ministry appears to have been spread over three years.

John the Baptist and Jesus

The first piece of evidence about Jesus that confronts the investigator is his unmistakable connection with the man called John the Baptizer or Baptist. John's career and his prominent place at the head of all the Gospels sharpen our focus on the mission and intent of Jesus. Except for Jesus' own baptism by John, we are shown no actual baptisms in the Gospels. The evidence is, however, suggestive (Jn. 4:1–2) that Jesus' followers continued the Baptist's practice of using a public washing to signal a spiritual rebirth. What is more certain is that, as time passed and its institutionalization proceeded, a baptism ritual was used to mark membership in the Jesus movement (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 1:14–17). Jesus' own participation in the rite is more problematic. John's Gospel seems almost offhandedly to mention that Jesus was baptizing (Jn. 3:21, 26), and then later, in what is obviously an editorial comment, and equally obviously a defensive one—there was a rumor that Jesus was by then winning more followers and baptizing more people than the Baptist himself—the Fourth Gospel loudly announces (4:2) that "Jesus was not in fact baptizing; it was his disciples who were doing the baptizing!"

The latter comment seems like another Evangelist attempt to put distance between Jesus and the Baptist. But for all the awkwardness that the connection with the Baptist posed, there is no reason that Jesus should not have

been doing what John was doing before him and his own followers were doing after him, and eventually in his name. Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and son of the Herod who had reportedly pursued the infant Jesus, heard and believed the report that Jesus was the Baptist come back from the dead (Mk. 6:14 and parr.). And when Jesus inquired of his own followers what people were saying about him, he was told that some people thought he might be John the Baptist (Mk. 8:27–28 and parr.). Jesus was closely associated with the Baptist. The two men had the same vision of an approaching End Time understood as the arrival of the "Kingdom of God." They preached righteous living rather than fastidious observance as the best preparation for the coming Judgment, and they both used submission to the familiar ritual act of "washing" as a signal that one accepted this new charge.

The Twelve

John had disciples, and so too Jesus after he left the fellowship of John. We don't know much about John's followers, but the function and actions of Jesus' disciples are described. What is here called a "movement" was at the outset two or three concentric circles surrounding Jesus. The first circle is that of "The Twelve." The movement remembered the Twelve clearly as a notion but less certainly as individuals, since their names differ in the various New Testament lists (Mk. 3:16–19; Mt. 10:2–4; Lk. 6:14–16; Acts 1:13), which points toward a collective rather than individual function. That function is already defined in Q as an eschatological one, to rule over the restored Twelve Tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:27; Lk. 22:30).

Though they later became the directors of the movement, during Jesus' own lifetime the Apostles appear generally to have had no administrative responsibilities, with two apparent exceptions. The first is the occasion in Matthew 16, where, after Peter confesses that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and "the son of the living God" (v. 16), Jesus says (v. 18): "You are Peter, and upon this Rock"—a pun on Peter's (Jesus conferred?) Aramaic nickname, Kepha (Gk. Cephas), "the Rock"—"I will build my assembly (*ekklesia*)." There is no question that Peter enjoyed a prominence among the Twelve in all the Gospels, in Acts and even in Paul, who was not much of an admirer, but that Jesus appointed him to head a "church," or any other kind of institution he was founding is contradicted by all the other evidence.

The other "appointment" is less direct but more likely. John (12:6) remarks of Judas, one of the Twelve, and the one who betrayed Jesus for money (Mk. 14:10–11), that "he was a thief, and he held the purse and carried the things that were put into it," suggesting that Judas was a kind of treasurer who managed the offerings to the group and paid out their expenses. This rather strongly implies that goods were held in common. But the arrangement may have been broader than that. Jesus' own teaching, while not specific about holding goods in common, advocated a trust in God's providence about even the basic requirements of life (Mt. 6:25–32).

Spreading the Good News

Jesus seems to have exposed his message broadly and publicly: it was a general ethic for the generality of Jews, not an appeal to a sectarian fellowship, an openness to all that incurred the displeasure of the Pharisees in

particular, who were attempting to inculcate a higher degree of ritual purity among their fellow Jews. He taught by examples rather than by prescriptions. There is one instance, however, where there was a prescription, and it was a severe one. As the Synoptics tell it (Mk. 10:17–30 and parr.), Jesus was approached by "a man of great wealth" who asked him how he might have a share in the Afterlife. Jesus replied in traditional fashion: observe the Torah. The man insisted he was observant. "Go, then," Jesus replied, "sell everything you have, give it to the poor—you will have treasure in heaven—and come follow me" (Mk. 10:21).

The man declined the invitation, and his refusal triggered Jesus' more general reflections on property and wealth, many of them collected in Q, where they are the basis of the modern judgment that Jesus was at base a social reformer, while in the narrative Gospels they have a more diffuse impact.

An Itinerant Preacher

As was clear in Q, the Gospels show Jesus, after his separation from John, as an itinerant preacher-teacher who spread his message in public and semi-private venues across Galilee, the largely rural and agricultural domain of Herod Antipas (r. 4 B.C.–39 A.D.), a puppet ruler who administered his allotment under the eyes of the Romans next door in Judea. There is, however, no "plain reading" of this heavily freighted text. Galilee is no longer just a landscape against which the career of Jesus unfolds. It is now the seat of a "colonial, cosmopolitan, peasant, purity, and patriarchal ('androcentric')" society. Nor do the texts constitute a homogenous account.

Jesus once had an occupation, carpenter, as did his circle of the Twelve. But as the Gospels unfold, Jesus and his followers no longer seem to be employed. Indications are that they were supported by some of his more prosperous followers in whose homes they stayed as they traveled through Galilee, including a number of women (Lk. 8:1–3), a circumstance that appears unusual for that time and place. Jesus and his circle seem to have moved from place to place as the occasion, or perhaps chance, dictated.

Some patterning is discernible, however. After a hostile reception, Jesus himself chose never to return to Nazareth (Mt. 13:54), which both Matthew and Luke call his "hometown" (Mt. 13:54; Lk. 4:23), because his neighbors there had no faith in him. Nor did he present himself in Galilee's only two cities, Sepphoris and Tiberias. The reason, some have thought, is because of the Gentile/pagan quality of those two places but, as it turns out, the population of both cities was predominately Jewish.

The Good News

The Gospels generally characterize Jesus' activity as preaching, teaching, and working what the ancient world generally knew as "wonders" (*thaumata*), but what the Gospels prefer to call "deeds of power" (*dynameis*) or, and this is particular to John, "signs" (*semeia*). The distinction between the first two, preaching and teaching, is maintained throughout. "Teaching" (*didaskein;* noun, *didaskalia*) is used for the imparting of instruction, in most cases moral or ethical instruction. "Preaching" (*keryssein;* noun, *kerygma*) is more accurately rendered as "proclamation" or "announcement," in this instance of the "Good News" (Greek: *euangelion*; Hebrew and Aramaic, *besora*).

The characterization of his proclamation as the "Good News" may be Jesus' own—the Gospels' and Q's insistence on the term suggests that it was—and the content of that pronouncement is unmistakable in the Gospels. Right at the outset, Mark sums up (1:14) Jesus' Galilean career: "After the arrest of John, he came to Galilee proclaiming (*kerysson)* the Good News of God [and saying] that the Kingdom of God was approaching. Repent and trust the Good News." Matthew's Gospel (4:21) similarly says of Jesus, with more emphasis on Jesus' instructional mission, that "he went about in all of Galilee, teaching [*didaskon*] in the synagogues and proclaiming [*kerysson*] the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and illness among the people." Even more pointed than these editorial summaries is what Q reports from Jesus' own mouth. Approached by some of John's own followers with the imprisoned Baptist's question whether he was the Expected One, Jesus answers (= Lk. 7:22), "Go and tell John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the halt walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the lowly are told the Good News."

The content of the Good News is presented in a remarkably straightforward fashion. Or so it seems. "The opportune moment has arrived," Mark has Jesus say. "Repent and trust in the Good News." Both the notions embedded in the summary, that of "changing your mind, changing your attitude," which is a more exact translation than the traditional "repent," and the appeal to an eschatological "kingdom," come directly from the Baptist's own version of the message. Jesus may, however, have reshaped John's eschatology somewhat by describing the End Time as the "Kingdom of God."

The Kingdom

A variety of "Apocalypses" or "Unveilings" were the favorite reading of many Palestinian Jews in the days after the Exile. But in what is a rare consensus, New Testament scholars are now agreed that the expression "Kingdom of God" to describe God's Final Rule is authentically Jesus' own. It does not appear exactly as such in the Hebrew Bible and only very rarely in the body of non-canonical Jewish writings of the Second Temple period. In the Gospels it is almost always Jesus (and not others) who uses the phrase, while it does not much occur in the rest of the New Testament. There can be no doubt that the "Kingdom of God" or "of heaven"* was a central concept in Jesus' message during his Galilean ministry, even though the notion, or at least the term, appears to have rather quickly faded from view in the sequel; it is not a critical element in the preaching of the apostles or Paul in the decades after Jesus' death. There is agreement too that what is usually rendered "kingdom" in that phrase is better understood as active sovereignty or rule rather than the state-like construct suggested by the English "kingdom."

The noun "kingdom" and its predicate "approaches" raise different issues. The word "kingdom" is elastic, but not ambiguous. The Greek *basileia* can mean both kingship/sovereignty and the state that follows from such, a kingdom, and modern translations swing between the two: "Kingdom of God" or "God's imperial rule," for example. The Roman overlords of Judea were familiar with both senses, *rex* and *regnum,* and were still close enough to their republican roots to be wary of both. *Rex,* king, was a title they condescendingly granted to their clients like Herod and then denied to his sons. And *rex*,

it should be recalled, was also part of the indictment of Jesus: *rex Ioudaeorum,* "King of the Jews," read the charge attached to his cross.

However the Romans might have heard the term, there is no certain sign that Jesus ever intended "kingdom" in a political sense. But its anticipated future presence—"May Your kingdom come, may Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10–11) was Jesus' own invocation of it—implies a change, and likely a massive change since the present human condition does not represent "God's imperial rule." The kingdom preached by Jesus would represent, then, a new order, and certainly a new moral order, but there are a few clues about its shape or form. One is that the "Twelve" were commissioned rather precisely to sit as "judges over the Twelve Tribes of Israel" (Mk. 10:37; Mt.19:28), a notion that somewhat bafflingly underlines both the real and the ideal side of the kingdom. The restoration of the long-since scattered ten tribes was an idea, an almost cosmic notion, but the appointment of twelve very concrete individuals gave it an unmistakable reality.

When Does the Kingdom Come?

Jesus' sayings on the subject strongly suggest that he expected, and probably preached, that God's rule would be established in its final and definitive form at some point in the future. Indeed, some passages rather clearly expressed his expectations of the kingdom in the very near future, indeed, while some of his listeners were still alive (Mk. 9:1; Mt. 16:28; Lk. 9:27). With the passage of time, that latter directive grew increasingly unlikely. Jesus' followers had to imagine other possibilities, and in the end they, or rather, the churches settled on a straddling answer: God's sovereignty was established in the first instance, or better, reestablished, either by Jesus' incarnation, the en-fleshing of the God-man, or by his redemptive death and would be followed, at some unknown future time, by the cosmic arrival of the kingdom in the old-fashioned Jewish apocalyptic sense.

The churches' compromise view has long prevailed, but there are many, and perhaps most of the scholar critics, who remain convinced that Jesus believed in and preached the imminent arrival of an eschatological kingdom. The evidence is admittedly ambiguous, particularly since we cannot ascertain with any degree of certitude which of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were actually his and which additions by later believers with somewhat different beliefs. Jesus undoubtedly fashioned the prayer that began with the imprecation "May Your Kingdom come!" (Mt. 6:10). But did he also say "The Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk. 17:21)? Or the Q saying, "If by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk. 11:30 and parr.)? If so, this is undoubtedly "fulfilled eschatology," as contrasted with the "imminent eschatology" of many other of Jesus' Gospel sayings and the "future eschatology" of the "Coming" or "Presence" (*parousia*) embraced by the churches.

What Did Jesus Preach?

Whatever later Christians came to believe about Jesus' postponed return, there can be no mistaking the immediacy of the expectations of Paul and the congregations in his care, on full display in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15. It is difficult to think that these first believers were so quickly

mistaken or deluded about Jesus' teaching on the kingdom that they missed his point that the kingdom was actually now and preferred to think that it was soon. The catastrophic events of 70 A.D. might have later turned the minds of Jesus' followers from a "spiritual" to a vividly eschatological kingdom, but in the 50s of the first century Paul was writing to Diaspora communities of Jews who had no sense of an impending military or political disaster.

The embryonic community that had gathered around Jesus was not quite a spontaneous formation around a charismatic leader; the Gospels underline the fact that Jesus had quite deliberately "called" the men who formed its nucleus and then had not only assigned them an eschatological role—rulers of the restored Twelve Tribes of Israel—but had also given them a mission, to go forth as *apostoloi* (or "sent ones") to carry his Good News to others.

Did, then, this array of Jesus and his followers represent the community of the kingdom? If so it could represent little more than an interim arrangement, since Jesus also quite obviously expected a transforming apocalyptic event out of which the "Kingdom of God" would emerge in its fullness. It was that latter that his followers were awaiting in Jerusalem after his disappearance from their midst. Perhaps, but there are, disconcertingly to modern scholarship, other sayings that broach another possibility. In Matthew Jesus says, a propos of his casting out demons, that if he accomplished it by the Spirit of God, then "the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt. 12:28 = Lk. 11:20), and in the Q passage (Lk 17:20–22), Jesus says "The Kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed. The Kingdom is among you," though the latter is immediately followed (vv. 23–37) by a prediction of a *future* coming.

These and similar verses have inclined many, either from a desire to save Jesus from erroneous prediction, or to justify the later Christian interpretation of a postponed kingdom, or, more recently, to save the social reformer from becoming an apocalyptic messianist, to read Jesus' message of the kingdom as being initiated and rendered operative by his own work. But that work was, by Jesus' own description in another Q passage (Lk. 7:18–23), precisely the miraculous cures that some critics have also been inclined to edit out of Jesus' actual career.

A Dual Kingdom?

Without ruling out the strong possibility of later editorial tampering and adjustments, the most sensible course is to think that Jesus meant both a future and in some sense a present kingdom. The main thrust of the preserved pronouncements is that the kingdom over which he would preside lay in the very immediate future. Its coming, moreover, would be by a miraculous act of cosmic proportions wrought by God and not one brought about by human diligence or striving. And if "kingdom" was the primary figure of the new condition, it was also symbolized as a messianic banquet (Mk. 14:25 and parr.) to which all the just would be summoned, even from among the Gentiles (Mt. 8:11–12; Luke 13:28–29) and where the poor, the humiliated, and the downtrodden would find their quittance (Mt. 5:3–12; Lk. 6:20–23).

But there is also no denying that in Jesus' mind the kingdom could, to some extent, be inaugurated, or perhaps, in the later language of the rabbis, be "hurried" by human moral effort. That effort is embodied in the ethic described and urged on his audiences throughout Jesus' Galilean ministry. It is even

conceivable that it might be achieved by more extraordinary means; witness the thinking behind Jesus' dispatch of his disciples (Mt. 10:23) to which Schweitzer called attention and, even more persuasively, by Jesus' own acts in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Messiahs and the Messiah

If "the Kingdom" represents the fulfillment of God's plan, what is Jesus' role in it? If his own immediate followers confessed him as the Messiah, then it would be natural for them to think of him as the ruler of the future kingdom. There is no clear evidence that Jesus claimed such—Was the protestation "My kingdom is not of this world!" (Jn. 18:36) his or his followers?—but it would be nonetheless natural that Messiah Jesus should be the ruling power in God's Kingdom.

Christian apologetics often gives the impression that in the first century A.D. there was a universal locked door recognized by all Jews and named "The Anointed" (Hebrew, *mashiah*; Greek, *christos*). Into its lock only one key would fit: the tumblers would turn, the door open, and the Messiah emerge. Then, in the midst of a tumultuous End Time, he would bring salvation to Israel and the Nations. Jesus' life and work and even his death matched every identified and recognized prophetic messianic passage in the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus was undoubtedly the Anointed One.

Soon the testing of that lock faded away. *Mashiah* meant little or nothing to the non-Jews who began to constitute the main following of Jesus, and the more familiar *Christos* quickly morphed from a title into a name for the God-Man. Jesus Christ was still the Messiah, but he was also Lord and Savior, the redeemer of humankind. The need for Jewish validation diminished and with it interest in the historical issue of Jewish messiahs. Jewish scholarship has never lost interest in messiahs, however, particularly since, according to many, the expectation of such is now an essential feature of Judaism. Essential or not, messianism remains a lively issue among Jews, and that interest has led to new research on messianism in Second Temple times.

The Jewish Evidence

The results are quite different from those long advanced by Christian apologists. Where the term "the anointed" (*ha-mashiah*) appears in the Bible, it is not used as a title but simply as a descriptive word that is regularly and normally applied to a priest or, more generally, a king, and never to a figure from the onrushing End Time. There is no Messiah in the voluminous writings of either Josephus or Philo. While it is certain that there was no general Jewish expectation, or even understanding, of someone called "the Messiah," messianic-type figures, eschatological saviors, do appear in Second Temple-era writings.

The actual messianic background against which Jesus appeared is illustrated in the extrabiblical books called 1 Enoch (the so-called "Similitudes"), 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra, in addition to a number of messianic reflections in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The figures identified as such are called by a variety of names like "Chosen One" or "Son of Man" and display diverse characteristics ranging from a celestial figure to a warrior to a teacher. No matter how many Jews awaited a savior *ex machina*—there was clearly no messianic consensus in Jewish expectations before or after 70 A.D.

Jesus as the Messiah was a claim that was never vacated by Christians, embedded as it is in the fabric of the Gospels, but messianism makes sense principally, and perhaps exclusively, to Jews, and with the rapid Gentilization of the Christian assemblies, "Messiah" became, in its Greek translation, Christos, first a name—as it is already in Paul, "Jesus Christ"—and then a generic title of honor that was elided with the far more Gentile-resonant, and intelligible, title of "Savior" (*sôtêr*). The Gentile Christians could far more easily grasp "Son of God" than the venerable but obsolescent (and Jewish) "Messiah."

A Reluctant Messiah

Jesus seems from the Gospels particularly elusive and reluctant on the subject, somewhat portentously dubbed "the Messianic Secret," as it was called in William Wrede's famous 1901 book. Jesus appears often to pull back from open identification of himself as such and warns those who had experienced his extraordinary curative powers "not to tell anyone" (for example, Mk. 8:30), not to reveal that he was the Messiah (Mk. 8:30) or the "Son of Man" (3:12). In addition to Wrede's own hypothesis, two general explanations have been put forward for this rather odd reluctance. The first, the standard Christian one, was to prevent misunderstandings of his messianic purpose. The more secular explanation is that Jesus was himself uncertain of his role in the unfolding movement.

Signs and Wonders

There are a few "events" in Jesus' Galilean ministry. He preached in parables where characters—kings, landowners, farmers, tenants, laborers—are recognizable, but anonymous, and the places and persons among whom this itinerant preacher moved were much the same: a town, a synagogue or someone's house, a hillside, a lakeshore. A few of the Twelve, Peter, James, and John, take life briefly from time to time, but then quickly recede back into the faceless crowds of those who came to follow or merely to watch or listen.

It must have been the watching that drew most of his audience, the reports of wondrously instantaneous cures cleansed on the instant and, what has almost disappeared from our own repertoire of miracles, the exorcisms of evil spirits. Generally, they were effected by a word or touch, though there are traces of the healing process, the utterance of words that the Christian tradition remembered in their original Aramaic, perhaps because of their intrinsic power (Mk. 5:41; 7:34); the placing of fingers into deaf ears and of spittle on a dumb tongue (Mk. 7:33); and even the rubbing onto blind eyes of a mud-like concoction of dust and spittle (Jn. 9:6). Remarkable too is the progressive cure of a blind man (Mk. 8:22–25) who begins to see, albeit imperfectly—"men walking—they look like trees"—after Jesus touches his eyes and applies spittle and then only later regains his full sight. These "process" miracles, seemingly effected *ex opera operato*, seem to place Jesus' miracle practice within the widely diffused ancient magic tradition.

The modern reader of the Gospel accounts may be torn between assent to a supernatural miracle and a deep-seated skepticism. But such skepticism is all modern; no trace of it arises out of the Gospel narratives themselves, nor from Josephus, who calls Jesus simply "a doer of wonders."

The ready acceptance of the wondrous on the part of Jesus' contemporaries is but one more sign that we live in a world quite different from Jesus' own. But the fact of Jesus' miracles are not the most important thing about them. What was likely more striking than their occurrence was Jesus' own connection of what he had wrought with the subject's prior act of "trust" and the concomitant remission of sin, since disease and moral transgression were linked in the medical and ethical calculus of that day. "Who has sinned," the bystanders asked regarding a blind man, "this man or his parents?" (Jn. 9:2).

Since the inception of the critical study of the life of Jesus, the miracles have been viewed with skepticism by historians. But on purely evidentiary grounds, some at least of the miracles are among the best attested of Jesus' deeds, and the strength of that evidence has constrained a majority of scholars to the concession that Jesus was indeed known as one who healed the sick and cast out demons. And Jesus' miracles, it appears, were performed not to verify his other claims, messianic or otherwise, but to confirm and reward the faith of those on whose behalf they were performed: "Thy faith has made thee whole" is a frequent and apparently authentic gospel refrain.

The Twelve were all quite specifically "called"—"Come, follow me," Jesus says (Mk.1:17)—but we cannot tell whether Jesus' immediate following was attracted by his teaching or his wonderworking. It is perhaps of little importance since at his death that following appears to have vanished at an instant and the Jesus movement had to be reconstituted anew by the Apostles.

A Jewish Teacher

By all the evidence, Jesus himself was an observant Jew. Circumcised on the eighth day according to Jewish law (Lk. 2:21), Jesus worshiped the One True God of Israel, and through the "Lord's Prayer" (Mt. 6:9–13), Jesus too prayed to his "Father in heaven" (Mk. 14:35–36). Though we are never shown him actually participating in Temple rituals, there is no reason to think that he did not. Like most contemporary Jews, Jesus observed the Sabbath and the dietary laws, though he disagreed with the Pharisees on some of the finer points of both observances, particularly with the wall of separation that the latter were attempting to erect between the Gentiles and their own "unclean," that is, unobservant, Jews on the one hand and, on the other, the purified "nation of priests" they were attempting to foster.

Much of Jesus' traditional Jewishness is unstated, as is that of a Pharisee of his own day and that of the rabbis of a somewhat later era. Most of these latter would quickly embrace the Gospel's "Great Commandment": "Love God and love your neighbor" (Mk. 12:29–31 and parr.). For Jesus as for them, this was the heart of the Torah. And however sensitive was the subject of the Sabbath, more than one Pharisee would have agreed with Jesus that "The Sabbath was made for the sake of men and not men of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). Chiefly and explicitly preserved are his talking points, emphases, and new directions. To the Great Commandment Jesus adds "and love your neighbor as well," to which he adds a series of very concrete illustrations (Mt. 5:38–49; Lk. 6:27–32).

But if he was familiarly Jewish, he was also different. Jesus was advocating a more individual, internal, conscience-driven morality. Jesus was grounded in the Torah but took spiritual wing above it. But to "rise above" can with

remarkable ease become to "fly away from," to transcend. It is difficult to say if Jesus understood his—and others'—relationship to God as transcending the Torah, but in less than a generation, some of his followers, most notoriously Paul, were forced to concede that it did. And beyond Paul the gap between Jesus' teachings, now interpreted and expanded by non-Jewish followers, grew progressively more distant from the Torah roots.

Jesus in Galilee

The two great sections of the Gospels, "Jesus in Galilee" and "Jesus in Jerusalem," have two different purposes manifested in the Synoptics—the distinction is blurred somewhat in John—by two narrative styles. The first was to record Jesus' teachings. We are presented with a portrait of a teacher with the emphasis not on his life but on his teaching. Jesus is a teacher of Jewish values to a Jewish audience. Though most of the examples emerge later when the rabbis' own *logia* are collected in the Mishna of circa 200 A.D., there were similar types in Galilee in Jesus' day.

Jesus was somewhat different from those other early examples, however. First, like John the Baptist, Jesus had profound eschatological concerns, while the later rabbis had been largely purged of these by the cataclysm of 70 A.D. But more startlingly, Jesus spoke and acted "with authority" (Mk, 1:27; cf. Lk. 4:36) and not like the rabbinic teachers who are invariably "traditionists" who taught on the authority of their masters or simply on that of the "tradition of the fathers."

Behind Jesus' teaching was an unstated (or obliquely stated) claim to authority by reason of what he was. Who he was was clear enough to his contemporaries: "Jesus, the son of the carpenter and of Mary" (Mk. 6:3; Mt. 13:55). But carpenters or their sons did not pronounce. They might point out signs of the End Time and call for "radical spiritual change," which was the burden of John's and Jesus' *metanoia*, but they assuredly did not set down ethical markers or revise the Mosaic Law, as Jesus did.

Jesus seems to have claimed no role in the coming kingdom; he was, like John before him, a mere "crier," a *vox clamantis.* But as Jesus' Galilean message unfolds, there appears the true problematic of Jesus' career: was Jesus a key figure in the End Time, the Anointed One (Hebrew and Aramaic: *messiah*) who appears as an agent of God's will in many of the apocalyptic scenarios? And if he were, where was the political and cosmic upheaval that was generally thought to accompany his arrival? Jesus' audiences surely have had problems with this and those who did accept him as Messiah must have thought that this particular Messiah had arrived prior to the End Time and that the latter was certainly close upon them.

---

*Matthew's preferred variant, "Kingdom of Heaven" may be a reflection of the author's very Jewish desire to avoid mentioning God's name.

LECTURE TEN

Questions

1. What did Jesus mean by the "Kingdom of God"?
2. Why was Jesus reluctant for his followers to tell anyone that he was the Messiah?

Lecture 11:
The Message:
Muhammad at Mecca

From one perspective, the Quran is a collection of inspired pronouncements arranged, like the material in Q, in a manner to suit the purposes of its editor(s). Later—the final version emerged about a century later—Muhammad ibn Ishaq had embedded small, now contextualized portions of those pronouncements in his narrative life of the Prophet. But we would be hard-pressed to reconstruct any intelligible version of our Quran from Ibn Ishaq's *Sira*; nor, indeed, any sense of Muhammad's eventful life from the Quran.

If the Quran is to serve as a biographical resource, it is necessary to determine the chronological order of its *sûras*. Muslim and Western scholarship has each attempted just that, and in the present enterprise we shall follow the classic division into forty-eight "Early Meccan" *sûras*, twenty-one in the "Middle Meccan" period, and twenty-one in the "Late Meccan" category.*

The Man Muhammad

On all the evidence, the young Muhammad—not the forty-year-old of the traditional chronology—had made little mark on his native Mecca before his emergence into the political limelight. Thanks to a providential marriage, Muhammad was engaged, like many other Meccans, in the local regional commerce in skins and raisins, though not, it would appear, in the care and feeding of pilgrims.

How far afield that commerce took him, we cannot say. Basing itself on such passages as Quran 7:157 and 158, the later Muslim tradition insisted that Muhammad could neither read nor write. The insistence appears apologetic—an illiterate Prophet could not "steal" the writings of the Jews and Christians—but if Muhammad was engaged in commerce, it is likely that he possessed some literate skills. It is even more certain, however, that he had never literally "read," nor was likely capable of reading, the Sacred Books of the Jews and Christians. He had heard the Meccan stories about Abraham and Ishmael and the Mecca's central shrine, the Ka'ba, and he must have prayed and sacrificed in the civil manner of his fellow Quraysh.

Though the evidence is divergent and even at times contradictory, there runs through the Muslim historical tradition the insistence, first, that there was a kind of nascent monotheism abroad in pre-Islamic Mecca. Its aficionados were called *hanifs,* a somewhat mysterious term that is applied in the Quran to Abraham (3:67) and seems to mean a "natural" monotheist, that is, a believer in the One God without benefit of revelation. And second, though Muhammad is never included among those pre-Islamic Arabian *hanifs,* he was reportedly caught up, like some few others there, in a more private and personal and exclusive devotion to the Lord of Ka'ba, the High God called in Arabic *Allah* or "The God."

The Call to Prophecy

In Ibn Ishaq's account, purportedly from the Prophet himself, in the month of Ramadan, Muhammad was in his usual retreat in a remote place near Mecca.

He was sleeping when the Angel Gabriel appeared, covered him with a blanket, "on which was some writing," and said "Recite!" The command was twice repeated, each time with the angel pressing on Muhammad's breast, and each time Muhammad answering "What shall I recite?" Finally Gabriel said:

> Recite in the name of thy Lord who created,
> Who created man of blood coagulated.
> Read! Thy Lord is most beneficent,
> Who taught by the pen,
> Taught that which they knew not to men.

These latter lines are the opening verses of what was later reckoned as the ninety-sixth *sûra* of the Quran, and here in the *Sira* it is being plausibly put forward as the earliest of Muhammad's revelations.

Ibn Ishaq continues with what is still professedly Muhammad's own account. The Prophet awakens and sees Gabriel, "in the form of a man," astride the horizon. The angel says, "Muhammad, you are the Apostle of God and I am Gabriel." Everywhere Muhammad looks, there is Gabriel in the sky.

Though the account in the *Life* attaches no Quranic passage to this latter vision of Gabriel, we can be sure that Ibn Ishaq was hearing here the only verses in the entire Quran that describe Muhammad's personal experience of the supernatural:

> By the star when it goes down, your companion is neither astray nor misled, nor does he say anything of his own desire. It was nothing less than inspiration that inspired him. He was taught by one mighty in power, one possessed of wisdom, and he appeared while in the highest part of the horizon. Then he approached and came closer, and he was at a distance of two bow lengths or closer. And He inspired His servant with what he inspired him. He [that is, Muhammad] did not falsify what he saw. Will you then dispute with him over what he saw?
>
> Indeed he saw him descending a second time, near the Lotus Tree that marks the boundary. Near it is the Garden of the Abode, and behold, the Lotus Tree was shrouded in the deepest shrouding. His sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong. Indeed, he saw the signs of his Lord, the Greatest.
>
> Quran 53:1–18

None of the pronouns is identified in these verses, though there is little doubt that the recipient of the vision was Muhammad. Who it was who was seen is less clear, and if Muhammad's being referred to as his "servant" in verse ten suggests God Himself, the Muslim tradition preferred to understand that it was Gabriel in all the other instances, chiefly because later in his own career Muhammad had unmistakably come to the same conclusion. Nor is there anything else is *Sûra* 53 to suggest that it was on either of these occasions that Muhammad received the words of the Quran.

An Experience on the Unseen World

Sûra 53 refers to Muhammad's two personal experiences of the *ghayb,* the "unseen world." On the face of it, no words were exchanged on either of those occasions, no revelations granted. The Quran does, however, make passing

reference to two other occasions that the Muslims regarded as highly consequential to Muhammad's prophetic calling. The first we have already seen, how the Muslims understood the terse remark in 94:1, "Have We not opened/expanded your breast," as an angelic purification of the Prophet, an event that occurred either in his childhood or just prior to his prophetic call.

The other incident is far more elaborate. *Sûra* 17 opens abruptly with the verse: "Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the sacred shrine to the distant shrine, whose surroundings We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs." That the subject is God and that the object of God's nocturnal activity, "His servant," is Muhammad is certain since the expressions conform to standard Quranic usage, as does the reference to Mecca as "the sacred shrine" (*al-masjid al-haram*). In *Sûra* 53 an earthbound Muhammad is merely a passive beholder of both God and the supernatural signs; here, however, he is carried off on a journey to another place, "the distant shrine" (*al-masjid al-aqsa*), and there shown what God wished.

A Heavenly Journey

The reading of this opening verse of *Sûra* 17 depends on how the phrase "the distant shrine" is understood, whether as heaven or as a specific place. In the end the Muslim tradition had it both ways. It produced a harmonizing version that described how Muhammad was first carried to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on a mythical beast called Buraq, and thence ascended into the seventh heaven and the presence of God. This was the occasion, it was later thought, that the entirety of the Quran was revealed to him, even though it was "sent down" to him piecemeal, as circumstances dictated.

Identification, Validation

The account in Ibn Ishaq's *Life* continues. After his experience with the angel, Muhammad returns, distraught, to his wife Khadija. He describes the experience and she seems to grasp its significance before he does: "I have hope that you will be the prophet of this people." But she wishes to reassure Muhammad and so seeks out her cousin Waraqa, "who had become a Christian and read the Scriptures and learned from those that follow the Torah and the Gospel." Waraqa listens and confirms Khadija's expectation: "Holy! Holy! Holy! . . . What has come to him is the greatest *Namus*, who came to Moses aforetime. He is, I tell you, and lo, the prophet of this people. Bid him be of good heart."

We are here obviously in the presence of another recognition scene, first by Khadija and then by Waraqa, but something else glimmers forth from the *Sira* account: Muhammad was uncertain what had occurred to him and the identification of the experience came—the criterion of embarrassment now asserts itself: would a Muslim have invented this?—from a Christian. Waraqa tells Muhammad that what has occurred to him is what had once happened to Moses with the sending down of the Torah of Sinai (= Gk. *Nomos* > Ar. *Namus*).

Muhammad's Public Preaching

The new prophet's public preaching appears to have been confined to his immediate family circle for three years. In Ibn Ishaq's *Life*, it is said that Muhammad told of what he had heard only to a restricted few. But

converts were made and the word spread until, after three years, God instructed him to "Proclaim what you have been ordered and turn away from the polytheists" (15:94).

The Warning

As the *sûras* unfold, the Prophet's confidence grows and his message is enlarged. There are new theological and eschatological concerns. It is belief the Quran now enjoins, belief that God is one—the God Muhammad refers to as his "Lord"—belief in the unlimited power of the One God and now in the fact that that power will be manifested in God's reckoning of mankind on the Last Day. Change your thinking and your life, the Quran warns, since a sure Hell awaits the sinner and a bounteous reward the just.

If Muhammad moved cautiously at first, the divinely originated message that was now being publicly pronounced for the crowds assembled in the Meccan Haram began to take some modest hold among those for whom it was intended in the first place, the pagans of Mecca, particularly the wealthy, powerful, and well-connected Quraysh who ruled the shrine-settlement.

The Message at Mecca

The chapters in the Quran are not arranged in the order in which they were revealed, but enough has been surmised to enable us to identify a group of the earliest of them, and so provide some notion of what the Quraysh were being told in those first couple of years, when the audience was the pagans of Muhammad's own birthplace.

What God required of the Meccans, the Quran instructed them, was "submission" (Arabic: *islam*; one who has submitted is a *muslim*) to God, The God. Muhammad had no need to introduce the Meccans to Allah; they already worshiped him, and in moments of crisis they even conceded that he was in fact the only genuine God. The trouble was, they worshiped other gods as well, and one of the central aims of the Meccan preaching was to make the Quraysh and other Meccans surrender their attachment to other deities.

But from the beginning Islam was far more than an acceptance of monotheism. The Quran called on the Meccans to "Repent!" The earliest *sûras* show that the reformation was overwhelmingly social, and perhaps economic. The original form of the message was narrowly targeted: it is good to share God's bounty and feed the poor and take care of the needy; it is evil to accumulate wealth solely for one's own selfish good.

God on High

Whatever his prior beliefs and practices, the Muhammad who began publicly to preach the "warning" and the "good news" of Islam in Mecca had a new understanding of God. It is not the Allah of the pagan Quraysh, nor yet the Allah of the assertive Prophet of Medina. In the early Meccan *sûras* Muhammad invariably refers to the deity not as "Allah" but rather as "Lord" or, since God is often the speaker, "your Lord." It is patently not the name of some new divinity; rather, it is a reference to a familiar. Who is Muhammad's "Lord"? It is not clear, at this point, though later it is unmistakably the *Allah* of the Quraysh and of the Jews and Christians.

"They Are Only Names"

At Mecca, Allah had a great deal of competition. Chief among them were the three goddesses al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat. The same three goddesses appear—and then disappear—in a curious and much-discussed passage in *Sûra* 53. Muhammad was still at Mecca and was apparently feeling the pressures of the Meccans' resistance to his message. According to Tabari's version of Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad grew anxious for something to come to him from God that would reconcile him with his townsmen. Then God sent down what is now *Sûra* 53. But when Muhammad came to the words "Have you thought al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third, the other?" (vv. 19–20), Satan cast onto his tongue, "because of his inner debates and what he desired to bring to his people," the words: "These are the high-flying cranes; verily their intercession is to be hoped for."

When the Meccan pagans heard this, the famous "Satanic verses," they were delighted and began to pay heed to his message, while the Muslims, who had complete trust in their Prophet, could not imagine an error on his part. And at the end, all worshiped together, the "Submitters" and the pagans. We are not told how long this blissful accommodation lasted. We know it ended with the sending down of the verses that are actually in the Quran:

> These are only names which you and your fathers have invented. No authority was sent down by God for them. They only follow conjecture and wish-fulfillment, even though guidance had come to them already from the Lord.
>
> Quran 53:23

The implications of a Quranic verse being uttered and then withdrawn are profound for Islamic scriptural theology and jurisprudence, but what is important here is what they reveal of the contemporary regard for the three goddesses. What was first granted and then rescinded was permission to use the three goddesses as intercessors with Allah. It was a critical moment in Muhammad's understanding of the distinction between Allah as simply a "high god" and the notion that Allah is uniquely God, without associates, companions, or "daughters."

Threats of the Judgment

This message got scant hearing from the Quraysh. The early *sûras* reflect the criticism they directed at the Messenger, and the heat of the Quranic preaching begins to rise in reaction. There are now fierce denunciations of the scoffers and unbelievers: for them is reserved a fiery hell, just as the believers would have reserved for them a true paradise of peace and pleasurable repose. At this point both the language and imagery become familiar to the Jewish or the Christian. The promised paradise is called the "Garden of Eden" and the threatened hell, "Gehenna."

The Quran early on unveils a vision of the Last Days to warn the unbeliever that the price of doubt is high and the rewards of submission are great. The Quran's version of the End is different from anything we encounter among the pre-Islamic Arabs, but it is noticeably similar to that among the Jews and Christians. Moreover, the Quran begins to unfold its own elaborate history of

prophecy. Muhammad, the Meccans are told, was not the first prophet sent to humankind, though surely he was the last.

The Seal of the Prophets

The Quran's view of the past is narrowly focused Sacred History, how the divine dispensation has unfolded from Adam down to the present. The story of the prophets is rehearsed at length in the Quran to make the point on which Jesus insists in Q, to wit, when humankind has refused to heed the bearers of God's message, the consequences have been terrible.

Thus Muhammad established his own pedigree in the essentially biblical line of the prophets (as a successor in particular of Moses and Jesus), and his Book, this "convincing Arabic Koran," as it called itself (36:69), took its place as an equal beside the sacred books of the Jews and Christians. Later, that claim to parity would take on meaning, but from Muhammad's original audience and Mecca, the references to other prophets were chiefly intended as a warning to reform and not as a prediction that a third great branch of monotheism had arisen out of the other two.

The Call to Prayer

We do not always know the contexts in which the Quraysh venerated their gods, but pray and worship they certainly did, and so when the Quran derisively dismisses it as "nothing but whistling and hand-clapping" at the Holy House (8: 35), the judgment is being made from a particularly Islamic perspective.

Prayer, a certain kind of prayer, is one of the earliest and most persistently urged elements of Muhammad's message, and prayer precisely as understood by the contemporary Jews and Christians, liturgical prayer, a public worship of God in the form of audibly uttered words—"Do not be loud in your prayer," Muhammad advises the Muslims, "nor speak it softly (as if in secret), but find a way between" (Quran 17:110)—accompanied by the traditional gestures or postures, and, eventually, at certain fixed times.

What Muhammad did and what he required of others at Mecca is open to doubt. The Muslims lived alone and isolated in a hostile pagan milieu, and it would have been difficult to practice public prayer, and it may well have been that their prayers were identical in form and setting with the Quraysh's or else were done privately and spontaneously. There are a number of prayer injunctions in the Meccan *sûras*, but they may as likely be addressed by God to Muhammad himself as prescriptions for general practice.

The early traditionist Waqidi says that the Quraysh had no problems with the Prophet's morning prayer at the Ka'ba, but for the prayer at sunset he and his companions had to scatter to nearby ravines. Why the Quraysh objected to one and not the other is not entirely clear.

The Prophet had received at Mecca some rather distinct instructions of when this was to be done: "Stand at (or establish) the prayer from the sinking of the sun until the darkness of the night and the morning recitation (qur'an), for the morning recitation is witnessed to" (17:80). In this last verse prayer is identified as "recitation," apparently of God's own words as indicated in "The Recitation" par excellence, *al-Qur'an*. The Quran's frequent references to itself as "The Book" speaks to the Jewish and Christian tradition of revelation as formal

written Scripture (*biblion*, *graphe*), while the name Quran points directly to the oral recitation of God's same words in a liturgical context. Contemporary Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions both enshrined the Book and used its recitation as a form of prayer to God. But even without the evidence of its name, the same conclusion would impose itself from the style and substance of the Quran. The early Meccan *sûras* bear all the stylistic and rhetorical earmarks of what was intended to serve, from the beginning, as prayers.

The Plot Against Muhammad

As Islam slowly spread in Mecca, the Quraysh appear to have made some initial effort to negotiate with him. According to Ibn Ishaq, they offered him all the blandishments of Mammon, from money to kingship. Or perhaps he was just possessed. In that event they would get him professional help.

These broad promises were likely neither sincere nor altogether practical, but they do attest to the magnitude of the threat that Muhammad was thought to pose to the social and commercial equilibrium of Mecca.

The negotiations broke off and the Quraysh increased the pressure on their increasingly troublesome fellow-countryman. Boycotts and bans were eventually followed by threats against Muhammad's life. The Prophet's reaction was a somewhat unexpected one: he sent some of his followers across the Red Sea to Abyssinia. The Quraysh quickly sent their own delegation to persuade the king to return the Muslims to Mecca, but he would not be persuaded.

Muhammad's Meccan enemies were unrelenting, however, and there were personal setbacks. In 619, he lost to death two of his staunchest supporters, Khadija, the "mother of believers," and Abu Talib, the uncle who had been first his guardian and then his strong political prop against the Quraysh. Muhammad grew desperate. He offered himself to the tribes of Arabs who came to the Meccan fairs not simply begging asylum, but boldly summoning them to Islam and telling them that he was a prophet who had been sent. He asked for their belief and protection only until God vindicated him. No one responded.

The petitioning finally paid off, however. Among those who heard the Prophet's pleas were visitors from the oasis of Yathrib, some two hundred seventy-five miles to the north of Mecca. Yathrib, later named "The City (*Medina*) of the Prophet," or simply Medina, was an agricultural settlement of mixed Arab and Jewish population. Ibn Ishaq regarded both the encounter and the presence of Jews at Yathrib as providential:

> Now God had prepared the way for Islam in that they [the Medinese Arabs] lived side by side with the Jews [of Medina], who were people of the Scriptures and knowledge, while they themselves were polytheists and idolaters. They had often raided them in their district and whenever bad feelings arose the Jews used to say to them, "A Prophet will be sent soon. His day is at hand. We shall follow him and kill you by his aid . . ." So when they [the Khazraj] heard the Messenger's message they said to one another, "This is the very Prophet of whom the Jews warned us. Don't let them get to him before us!" Thereupon they accepted his teaching and became Muslims . . .
>
> ~Ibn Ishaq, 1955:198–204

The bargaining proceeded. What Muhammad required above all was security for himself and his followers, but though he did not forget he was the Messenger of God, the terms of his removal to Medina did not require that all there should become Muslims. The new Medinese converts carried the terms back to their fellow oasis-dwellers for approval, but meanwhile another event commemorated in the Quran occurred, one with enormous political consequences for the nascent Islamic community: the Prophet's formal rejection of passive resistance to persecution and a turn to the use of force.

The Use of Force

The Messenger had not been given permission to fight or allowed to shed blood before the conclusion of the agreement with Medina. He had simply been ordered to call men to God and to endure insult and forgive the innocent. The Quraysh had persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion and exiling others from their country. They had to choose whether to give up their religion, be mistreated at home, or flee the country. Now, suddenly, all that changed.

"Permission is granted those [to take up arms] who fight because they were oppressed," verse 29 of *Sûra* 22 begins. This permission to fight, to turn from passive to active resistance to the Quraysh, was no trifling matter, as its divine sanction shows. The Quraysh's commercial enterprises were protected by their own religiously sanctioned prohibitions against violence and bloodshed during the months of pilgrimage and the annual fairs connected to it.

The Migration

The arrangements at Medina were now complete and the *hijra*, the migration of Muslims to Mecca, began, though gradually and with great caution, beginning with Muhammad's followers. The Quraysh became aware that the Muslims were slipping away and decided to assassinate the cause of their discontent. But the plan misfired. Warned of the plot by the Angel Gabriel, Muhammad slipped away with Abu Bakr while Ali pretended to sleep in his stead, before he too successfully escaped and joined the others at Medina.

---

*The Meccan eras of the Quran, each arranged in a highly speculative chronological order, are as follows:

The First Meccan Period: *Sûras* 96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, 1.

Middle Meccan Period: *Sûras* 54, 37, 71, 76, 44, 50, 20, 26, 15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, 27, 18.

Late Meccan Period: *Sûras* 32, 41, 45, 16, 30, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28, 39, 29, 31, 42, 10, 34, 35, 7, 46, 6, 13.

The lengthy chapters that are reckoned to be **Medinan**: *Sûras* 2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5.

Questions

1. Is the "distant shrine" heaven or a specific place?
2. What are the "satanic verses"?

Lecture 12:
Act II:
Tragedy and Triumph

Jesus and Muhammad each made an abrupt entrance upon the familiar stage of his own homeland and had a public life as a not altogether successful preacher. And each ran into serious, life-threatening opposition that threatened his life and that of his followers. With that the stage cleared and each protagonist entered into the second and final act of his dramatic life.

Jesus in Jerusalem

There is a pastoral quality to the Galilean chapters of the Gospels. The fields, plains, hills, and sea are all on display, as are the people who work in them. When the action is moved to Jerusalem, the focus is so intensely centered on events that we get little sense of the ordinary life of the city.

"Jesus in Jerusalem" is not an arbitrary division in a narrative of the life of Jesus. All four of the Gospels fall into this two-act scenario: Jesus in Galilee and Jesus in Jerusalem (with appendices on the Risen Jesus). The second act begins with the arrival in Jerusalem of Jesus and his inner group of supporters. There follow his increasingly portentous remarks and the equally portentous events that precede Jesus' celebration of Passover. Here the four Gospels come together to describe his arrest outside the city, a late night hearing before the High Priest, a trial the next morning before Pilate, and his final execution by crucifixion outside what was then the western wall of the city, all of which constitutes the largest single part of the Gospel narratives.

A Common Account?

Chronologically, the earliest view we have of the final week in Jesus' life is in the two lines of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (15:3–4), where we are told simply that the "tradition" received by Paul and now passed on—surely not for the first time—to the believers in Corinth was that "Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried . . ." The plain, undetailed facts, "died" and "was buried" are here quite wrapped in the now familiar argument "in accordance with the Scriptures" and already freighted with a profound theological significance, "for our sins." Jesus' immolation as a sin-offering to God had thus early entered the Christian repertoire.

The Gospel accounts that follow are all very conscious of the argument for Jesus' claims based on the fulfillment of Scripture, and they provide an ongoing biblical gloss on the events of Jesus' last days. But they are also interested, as Paul obviously was not, in what happened when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the last time. All four Gospels speak of the events, but what is chiefly noteworthy about their accounts is that, though John and the Synoptics go their own way in the incidents leading up to the event, from the arrest onwards (Mk. 14:43–52; Jn. 18:2–11), Mark and John have the same schematic presentation of the same events in the same order. This extraordinary agreement of the two suggests at least that early on there was, if not a common literary source, a basic common account of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution.

A Triumphal Entry

Jesus comes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover under a sky darkened by his own predictions. “We are now going to Jerusalem,” he told the Twelve. And then, invoking his messianic title, “The son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes; they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. He will be mocked and spat upon and flogged and killed, and three days afterwards he will rise again” (Mark 10:33–34).

But despite predictions, the week begins in apparent triumph. On the very day of his arrival Jesus enters the Holy City in what appears to be a carefully staged procession. The royal detail—the requisitioned mount, the clothes spread on the ground before him, the waving palm fronds, his acclamation as the “son of David”—fulfills a prophecy, as Matthew is once again careful to tell the reader (Matthew 21:4). Everyone in the city must have been aware of this very public demonstration. It was certainly known to the Romans, who were on high alert in Jerusalem during Passover.

The Temple Incident

Jesus spends the following day in sightseeing: “He went into the Temple and looked around at everything” (Mark 11:11). He did not like what he saw. The next day Jesus returned and drove out the sellers of the kosher animals prescribed for Temple offerings and overturned the tables of those who change Roman coinage into the Temple shekels used to pay the religious tithes (Mk. 11:15–17). This time it is Jesus himself who quotes the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah: “You have turned his house of prayer into a den of thieves” (Mark 11:17).

What first arises off the Gospel text is Jesus’ disgust at the commercial goings-on in the Temple precincts. But his objection could only have been aesthetic; there was nothing illegal or immoral about either of those activities, but Mark immediately moves on to something deeper and darker. “The chief priests and the scribes heard of this and looked for a way to bring about his death” (Mark 11:18). The incident was clearly too minor to provoke any immediate response either by the Romans or the Temple authorities: Jesus simply walked off and then returned to the Temple on the next day, when all he gets is a question: “By what authority are you doing this?” (Mark 11:28).

A Priestly Plot

Jesus was put to death effectively by the Romans, all the Gospels agree, through the machinations of Temple priests. Jesus himself appears to have had no issues with either the institution or the individuals who made up the Temple priesthood. Rather, he reserved his scorn for the Pharisees, the advocates of a meticulous observance of the Torah. Thus Mark draws our attention to the Temple incident as a possible cause of the priestly plot, and some modern critics have read it as a highly charged symbolic act by which Jesus signaled the end of the old spiritual order and the initiation of the new. The High Priest understood both the gesture and its intent and reacted accordingly.

John locates the Temple incident early in Jesus’ career (John 2:13–22) and so disconnects it from a priestly plot. But for John there was such a plot and he seems to have had privileged information about its hatching,

very probably from Nicodemus, a member of the ruling Sanhedrin and a secret follower of Jesus (John 3:1–2). Jesus performed the famous, and for some notorious, act of raising a certain Lazarus from the dead in a suburb of Jerusalem (John 11:1–44). The news spread and an alarmed Sanhedrin was convened in Jerusalem:

> "What action are we taking?" they said. "This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone like this the whole populace will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our Temple and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said, "You know nothing whatever; you do not use your judgment; it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should be destroyed." . . . So from that day on they plotted his death (Jn. 11:47–53).

Challenges

Mark's narration does not proceed in a straight line. Jesus is challenged by three different groups. The first is by the Pharisees, who pose Jesus a trap-question on the legitimacy of paying tax to the Romans, which he elegantly sidesteps: "pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:15–17). Next are the Sadducees, the priestly party. It is the resurrection, which they deny as not having any scriptural warrant, that interests them. Jesus dismisses them: "You understand nothing about Scripture or the power of God" (12:19–27). Finally, the scribes come forward and ask the classroom question of which of God's commandments is the greatest. Jesus gives the classroom answer straight from Deuteronomy (6:4–5), is congratulated, and returns his own compliment, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (12:28–34).

The Last Days

All the Synoptics at this point insert into their account Jesus' version of an apocalypse, an unfolding of the Last Days (Mark 13 and parallels). Then in Mark 14 (= Matthew 26–27; Luke 22–23; John 12–19) begins an account of Jesus' own end. "Two days before the festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread," the priests begin devising a scheme to do away with Jesus, but not, they agree, during the holy days, "else there would be rioting among the people" (14:1–2). Jesus meanwhile is at a friend's house in Bethany. And it was there that Judas, one of the Twelve, resolved to betray Jesus. The motive was money (14:10–11).

The Last Supper

The next day, Passover eve, there takes place what Christians came to call the Last Supper or, when it began to be reenacted as a Christian liturgy, the Eucharist (Mark 14:12–26). Matthew, Luke, and John all have Jesus wash the feet of his followers, Mark does not. At the meal Jesus predicts his betrayal by one of the Twelve present, and John (13:30) has Judas leave soon after.

At some point Jesus takes bread, blesses it, and distributes it to the apostles with the extraordinary words, "This is my body" (Mark 14:22 and parallels; Paul 1 Corinthians 11:24). He does the same with a cup of wine: "This is my

blood," and ends, "the blood of the new covenant, shed for many (Mark 14:24 and parallels; 1 Corinthians 11:25), and Paul's account adds to both the bread and the wine, "Do this in remembrance of me." The reenactment of the ritual of the bread and wine became the central act of worship among Christians.

The Arrest in the Garden

Jesus and the Twelve, now eleven, go out into the night to a private olive garden on the near slope of the Mount of Olives, and there Jesus decides to pray (Mark 14:26–32). It is an anguished prayer (14:33–36). Judas appears with the Temple police and identifies Jesus. There is a scuffle and Jesus is put under arrest. His followers flee (Mark 14:43–50).

The Sanhedrin Trial

Jesus is taken directly back into the city, this time to the house of the high priest Caiaphas, where there is a trial, though it seems to lack all formality (Mark 14:53–72). When he is identified by his Galilean accent, Peter denies any association with Jesus, not once, but three times, as Jesus had earlier predicted (Mark 14:30). Witnesses—they lied, the Gospels aver—testify that Jesus threatened to destroy the Temple. The defendant is silent. The High Priest then poses the question direct: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" "Yes," Jesus responds. "I am. And you will see the son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark: 61–62). "Blasphemy!" the high priest cries.

The Trial Before Pilate

Jesus must have spent the night in custody at the high priest's house, much of it while being abused by the servants (Mark 14:66). Matthew alone (27:3–10) reports the end of Judas: he hanged himself in remorse. Early the next morning, Friday and the first day of Passover, the Jewish authorities bind Jesus over to the Roman procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who hears the case. Pilate has no interest in messiahs. "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Mark 15:2). Jesus declines to answer. Pilate, who is portrayed in the Gospels as a reluctant prosecutor and judge, tries another approach. He offers to the crowd outside the praetorium a Passover amnesty: he will release either Jesus or the imprisoned political terrorist Barabbas. But "the chief priests incited the crowd" (Mark 15:11) and they call for the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus.

Jesus is stripped, a purple robe thrown around his shoulders, a crown of thorns placed on his head, and he is mocked and roughed-up by the Roman soldiers. He is once again shown to the crowd, who are growing increasingly restless and violent. "I find no criminal fault in him," Pilate is made to say, and he washes his hands in a formal gesture of disavowal. It is Matthew alone who supplies the blood-curdling finis. "I am innocent of this man's blood," Pilate says. "It is now your business." "And all the people answered, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children'" (Matthew 27:24–26).

The Crucifixion

Roman criminals were flogged into a state of weakness before they were crucified. So it was with Jesus, who was then taken to Golgotha. He is nailed

to a cross to which was attached his indictment, “The King of the Jews.” Two “brigands”—the contemporary codeword for political terrorists—are crucified with him and they join with the bystanders in mocking Jesus. “If you are the Messiah of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see and believe” (Mark 15:32).

Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning (Mark 15:25) and hung on the cross until three in the afternoon, when he finally expired: “Jesus gave a loud cry and died” (Mark 15:37). There were omens and prodigies. Darkness covered the earth from noon on, and at the moment of Jesus’ death the veil that shielded the Holy of Holies in the Temple was rent in two. And the Roman centurion who stood guard at the foot of the cross was heard to say “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15:39). All who remained to witness the end were “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses and Salome.* These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee . . .” (Mark 15:40–41).

The Burial

The Jewish Sabbath would have begun at sunset on that Passover Friday and so there was some haste in removing the body from the cross and interring it. The arrangements are taken care of by one Joseph of Arimathea, “a respected member of the Sanhedrin who was also himself awaiting expectantly for the Kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43). John adds (19:39) that Nicodemus, Jesus’ other follower on the Sanhedrin, was involved. Pilate is asked to release the body, which Pilate does. Joseph wraps the body in a linen—a more elaborate washing and anointing will take place once the Sabbath has passed—and places it in a tomb newly hewn out of the rock face in a garden nearby (Mk. 15:46; Jn. 19:40–42).

So ended the public career of Jesus of Nazareth. He died, like many other claimants to power or authority in that day, as a condemned criminal at the hands of the Roman in whom resided all power and authority. But unlike most of those others, Jesus was not seized in an open act of revolt or disobedience but, it would seem, in anticipation of what he might do. Likewise, it was not to the Romans that he was principally the concern, but to the Jewish authorities, the Temple priesthood. Did he threaten Judaism or did he threaten the priests and the Temple, which was not only the spiritual center of Israelite identity but the dominant economic institution in Israel?

Muhammad at Medina

The future at Mecca was bright for neither the message of Islam nor its messenger. Khadija was dead, his clan protector Abu Talib was dead, and the surrounding tribes and settlements to whom Muhammad had offered himself showed little inclination to anger the Quraysh by granting him asylum. Salvation came in an unexpected form from a not entirely unexpected source. Among those who had come to Mecca for the commercial fairs were men of Medina, an oasis two hundred seventy-five miles northeast over rough terrain from Mecca. They had heard the Prophet more than once and were impressed; they were ready to “submit.” But they had another idea. The two paramount Arab tribes of the oasis and their associated Jewish

clients had been locked in a destructive civil war for over a decade. Mistrust and violence had turned the oasis into an armed camp. Muhammad, it was thought, as a recognized holy man, might perform one of the traditional duties of such Arabian charismatics and arbitrate the differences that were destroying an otherwise prosperous agricultural settlement.

The Medina Accords

The Medinese agreed, and in 622, Muhammad and his Muslim followers completed the gradual and stealthy "migration" (*hijra*; *Hegira*) from Mecca to Medina, an event Muslims later used to mark the beginning of the Muslim or "Hijri" era. Some of his followers who had earlier been sent to Christian Abyssinian for their protection also rejoined the community at Medina. And in the spirit of reconciliation, or desperation, that had prompted the invitation, there was drawn up what might be called the "Medina Accords." It is a multi-part document that constituted all the population of Medina, Muslims, pagans, and Jews, a single community. All parties agreed to accept Muhammad's judgment as final in the affairs of the oasis.

Muhammad's Meccan followers, "the Migrants," had to be integrated and supported inside the tight oasis society, and the Jews of Medina, who were arrayed on both Arab sides of the conflict in the oasis, almost certainly had qualms about this new "prophet" who was now their sovereign and whose message was uncomfortably like their own beliefs.

Muhammad and the Jews of Medina

With his conviction that he stood in the line of Abraham and Moses, Muhammad may well have expected the Medinese Jews to accept his prophetic claims as willingly as they had his new political charge. They did not, and the Quran reflects Muhammad's reaction. Certain Muslim practices are changed: no longer will they pray facing Jerusalem, as the Jews did; rather, Muslims would henceforth face toward the Arabs' own Ka'ba at Mecca. The Quran's own tone noticeably darkens in references, if not to the still revered "Israelites" of old, then certainly to the contemporary "Jews" (*Yahud*), who are accused of religious deception, like changing the Scripture to give the lie to Muhammad and, more consequentially, of political treason. Muhammad was convinced that the Jews of Medina were taking counsel with his Quraysh enemies of Mecca to dislodge and destroy him. Over the next decade, Muhammad first dislodged and then destroyed the Jews at Medina.

Muhammad's attitude toward the Jews of Medina affected his politics but not his theology. The Quran continued to preach Islam as the natural born successor and heir to both Judaism and Christianity. Moses and Abraham, who was neither an Israelite nor a Jew in Muhammad's regard, were still prophets of the highest rank, and the Jews never ceased being, like the Christians, "People of the Book," the recipients of an authentic earlier revelation and so eligible for special treatment under Muslim sovereignty. Unless they converted to Islam, pagans were exterminated wherever they were found. Jews and Christians had only to signal political submission; once done, they were to be permitted to continue in their now distorted but undoubtedly genuine religious beliefs.

Badr Wells

Before there could be political submission, there had to be conquest. That grave step—God had permitted Muslims to take up arms against oppression only during the final dark days at Mecca—was taken in 624 A.D, two years after the Migration. Muhammad led his Meccan Migrants to the ambush of a Quraysh caravan; the encounter took place at a watering hole called Badr Wells. The ambush was an act of retaliation against the Quraysh, but it may also have been intended to ease the uncertain economic situation of the Migrants at Medina. Whatever its motive, the venture was an unexpected success and made an enormous impression on the Medinese, who were taking the measure of the loot, one suspects.

The raid at Badr Wells changed the fortunes of Islam. Muhammad, the preacher of Mecca, had gained a few souls and had generated a near fatal animosity there. The Muhammad of Medina, whose mind was clearly on Mecca and the Quraysh, would likely have done equally poorly there as a public administrator with a prophetic agenda. But Badr Wells put him in a new light. Were the still-pagan Medinese impressed by the theology of Badr—God was clearly on our side, the Quran claimed—or the size and ease of the spoils? And the prospect of more?

A Failed Response

The Badr Wells attack stirred the Quraysh at Mecca. There were two retaliatory attacks on Medina. Both failed. The first was a serious assault on the oasis, when the Prophet was wounded; the latter a somewhat ineffectual siege. The Arabs of the settlements were unaccustomed to warfare—it was chiefly the Bedouin who entertained and honored themselves with battle—but there seems a singular failure of will on the part of the Quraysh when it came to Muhammad. They lacked Muhammad's iron resolve, and in 630, Muhammad and the Muslims interrupted their rolling wave of Arabian conquests to accept the peaceful submission of Mecca. What is perhaps more surprising is that the Prophet then turned his back on his birthplace with its "House of God," one of the holiest places on earth, and returned to Medina to rule, just as his successors did, rather than from Mecca.

The Islamic Project

From Badr Wells to his death in 632, Muhammad was engaged in two major enterprises, the unfolding of the political culture of Islam through Quranic revelation and his own personal instruction and counsel, and the construction and consolidation of the community of Muslims, the shaping of a political culture. The two are kept relatively separate in our sources. The Medina chapters of the Quran are devoted entirely to the first; the storms and stress of the Muslims' military adventures find only the faintest of echoes there. For the latter, one must turn to the later literary sources, the standard *Life of the Prophet* and the triumphant genre called "The Raids." For the Muslim historians, these "raids" are in fact the chief matter of Muhammad's life at Medina.

It was at Medina surely that the cult practices of Islam first began to be publicly deployed: the often clandestine prayer at Mecca became the prescribed five daily prayers, including the noon prayer on Friday when the

entire community crowded into Muhammad's courtyard—the prototype of the later mosque—to hear his instructions and exhortation; the payment of the tithe for the support of the needy; the fast during the lunar month of Ramadan; and, belatedly, the *hajj* or ritual pilgrimage to the holy places in and around Mecca, which Muhammad made as a Muslim—it was a long-established pre-Islamic ritual at Mecca adapted into Islam—for the first and last time just before his death. The Quran, meanwhile, continued to answer questions, resolve doubts and disputes, and stiffen resolve.

Submission

For the eight years of Muhammad's life after Badr Wells, the military expeditions called "raids" were almost continuous. And almost always successful. The surrounding settlements were approached and submission demanded. In the case of pagans, the submission was both political and religious: they had to accept the sovereignty of both the Muslims who stood armed before them and of Islam, or else be destroyed. And once Muslims, they had to pay the religious tithe into the Muslim treasury at Medina. If they were Jews or Christians, they had, as has already been noted, to accept only Muslim political sovereignty and, of course, the tax that accompanied it.

Imperium Islamicum

In such circumstances, there is little talk of, and obviously little time for, date palm cultivation at Medina. The oasis was becoming an imperial city, and if the Muslim *imperium* was still, during Muhammad's lifetime, limited to Arabia and the southern reaches of what is today Jordan, it soon passed extravagantly beyond those frontiers. The Prophet, whether he intended it or not, and he seemingly had not, had created not merely a church, to use more modern terms, but also a state; and he stood, without competition from either a pretender or a priesthood, at the head of both. The Frankish Christians had to counterfeit a document to pass temporal authority from the hands of an emperor into those of a pope. The Muslims had no need. Muhammad was his own Constantine and his own Sylvester, an emperor and a pope who did not require two swords but only the sharp two-edged scimitar he had forged himself.

Muhammad died in 632 at the height of his spiritual and political power. He was by the common reckoning sixty-two years old, but he may very well have been somewhat younger than that. He was carried off by an unspecified illness whose onset was unattended, but which permitted him to linger for two weeks before expiring. So his death, though unexpected, was not surprising.

---

*Some naturally wish to identify this "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" as Jesus' mother. John after all puts her there, together with her sister, "Mary, the wife of Clopas," as well as Mary Magdalen (Jn. 19:25). It is almost impossible to say.

Questions

1. What threat did Jesus pose to the Jewish authorities? To the Romans?
2. What were the implications of Badr Wells?

Lecture 13:
The Aftermath, the Legacy

Jesus, the Aftermath

Jesus in Jerusalem ends in the Gospels with the body of Jesus being taken down from the cross of his execution and placed in a nearby rock-hewn tomb chamber. A stone was rolled across the entry to protect the body from animal scavengers and, just possibly, tomb robbers. Matthew alone introduces exactly that notion. He has the priests and the Pharisees go to Pilate and request a guard for the tomb to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing the body and claiming that "he has risen from the dead" (Mt. 27:62–66). There is a narrative follow-up (Mt. 28:11–14). When the empty tomb is discovered, the same priests bribe the Roman guard to tell Pilate that that was exactly what happened. They did so, and then we reach the point of Matthew's tale, and are given a rare glimpse of contemporary Jewish reaction to Jesus: "The story became widely known and is current in Jewish circles to this day" (28:15).

It was not a glorious end to a very short and not terribly successful career of an itinerant Galilean charismatic who claimed to be Daniel's messianic "Son of Man." He had managed to stir some local waters and even make a small splash in Jerusalem. He had attracted some followers, not very many apparently, and had somewhat inexplicably made enemies in high places, and it was they who did him in. The leader was dead and his followers dispersed. But then, on the Sunday following Jesus' Friday Passover execution, a new story began to circulate, or so the Gospel accounts tell us: Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead.

It is at this point that the historians lose interest in the Jesus story: the Risen Christ is not an appropriate or even a viable subject of historical inquiry. But there is historical matter here, not least in the nature of the construction and presentation of this critical element in their case for Jesus.

The Empty Tomb

All four Gospels agree, it was Mary Magdalene, "Mary from Migdal," together with the two other women who had stood by the cross at the end, who went to the tomb that Sunday morning and found the stone moved—Matthew alone has an angel come down from heaven and do the heavy rolling (28:2)—and the chamber empty. They are greeted by an angel, in Matthew the same who had rolled back the stone. He tells them not to be afraid, that Jesus has risen from the dead and returned to Galilee. "Tell the disciples," they are instructed (Mt. 28:7; Lk. 24:9). The Apostles are skeptical of the story (Lk. 24:10–11), but in the end Peter, and perhaps John (Jn. 20:3), go to investigate. The tomb was indeed empty, they discover. John has a more circumstantial account (Jn. 20:1–10). They enter the tomb, Peter explicitly the first, and find the discarded shroud lying there. Jesus meanwhile appears to Mary Magdalene, who was waiting outside. She at first mistakes him for the gardener, but when she finally recognizes him and attempts to embrace him, she is somewhat mysteriously told, "Do not touch me for I am not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:11–18).

The Resurrection Accounts

Of our three earliest sources on Jesus, one, the sayings source Q, appears to be unaware of both the death and the resurrection of Jesus while another, the Gospel of Mark, seems almost oblivious of the reports of the resurrection.[1] Almost, but not quite. Mark 16:7 has a "young man . . . wearing a white robe" and seated at the right of the burial place say to the women who found Jesus' tomb open and empty that Sunday morning, the same three who witnessed his death, "He has been raised; he is not here . . . Go and say to his disciples and Peter 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'" But the story, in its original Markan version ends there: we are not taken to Galilee; we do not see the risen Jesus.

Paul, generally reckoned as our earliest source, wrote to the believers in Corinth about what he had told them in the late 50s, about "the tradition I had received . . . that he [Jesus] was buried and raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the Scripture" (1 Cor. 15:4). And there is more. The reality of his resurrection was verified by his appearance to a number of people, "Cephas [Peter] and then to the Twelve," as well as to other witnesses, "most of whom are still alive" (15:6). Paul's "tradition" goes back to an even earlier time, most likely to his first two-week meeting with Peter and James in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–19), perhaps as early as 37 A.D. Earlier too is likely the formulation in the opening of Romans (1:4), "that he [Jesus] was proclaimed Son of God by an act of power that raised him from the dead." Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the new faith, Paul concludes. Without the resurrection, "your faith is empty" (1 Cor. 15:17).

If the resurrection was the cornerstone of the new Christian movement, "new" in the sense that it was no part of Jesus' own "Good News," why was it not mentioned in Q and only uncertainly included as an afterthought in Mark? The simplest solution is that Q was collected or composed as a record of Jesus' sayings, perhaps during his lifetime, or perhaps immediately after his death, and certainly before the resurrection stories began to circulate. Mark's Gospel presents a more difficult problem. It is a composition, one of whose purposes, and perhaps its chief purpose, was on the face of it to explain Jesus' death. It does this in detail, and while it mentions, almost in passing, the fact of the resurrection (16:7), it seems unaware of the importance of the appearance of witnesses who in Paul stand so central to the proof that the resurrection in fact occurred.

Fixing the date of Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, hangs solely upon being able to find convincing mention of the actual siege and destruction of Jerusalem in its thirteenth chapter of the Gospel. To the few who are unable to find it, the date of Mark must inevitably be moved back to somewhere before 70 A.D., though exactly where is an open question. It is conceivable, then, that, given the absence of an address to the resurrection, Mark was written even earlier than Paul, at a time and a place that saw the crucifixion of the Messiah as the central issue. The alternative explanation is to keep the traditional dating of ca. 70 A.D. and think rather that the original ending, with the resurrection appearances already predicted in 16:7, was lost—something that would explain the grammatical awkwardness of v. 8—and that someone later tried to correct the loss by the addition of the so-called "Markan Appendix" (vv. 9–20), which is substantially the same as Matthew's post-resurrection account (Mt. 28:8–20).

All three of the Synoptics betray odd pre-Pauline characteristics. They know the story of Jesus—and Paul shows he knows it too, even though he is not about to tell it—but their understanding of Jesus is essentially messianic. Though the commonly held opinion is that the Gospels were composed after Paul's letters of the 50s, they share few of Paul's theological and ecclesiastical concerns. Could Matthew and Luke be pre-Pauline as well? The only thing certain about the dating of Matthew and Luke is that they are later than Mark. And if most think that the Roman destruction of Jerusalem is even clearer here than in Mark—Luke 21:20 is often cited in evidence—it should be remembered that volume two of Luke's work, the Acts of the Apostles, breaks off at about 60 A.D., with Paul's arrival in Rome, but before his death there, possibly in 64. If that is the *terminus ante quem* of Acts, Luke's Gospel must be even earlier, perhaps in the late 50s.

The Witnesses

The tail-end of the Gospels, whether original with Matthew and Luke, or added with Mark and John,[2] all have to do with the appearances of the risen Jesus to a number of his followers. The historian can but note their function. As Paul, who is the earliest to mention them, makes clear, these individuals constitute the formal witnesses, if not to Jesus' actual resurrection, then to its actuality.

The Gospel reports of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances are discordant and even contradictory. And none of them adds up to the summary account, which may be a traditional formula, that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians (15:5–8). More, they have an odd quality to them, as the witnesses seem to be struggling with the otherness and the sameness of what they had seen. Jesus warned Mary Magdalene, who had trouble recognizing him, not to touch him, since "he had not yet ascended to the Father." Two disciples who randomly encounter him on their way to Emmaus also do not recognize him, but soon a very substantial Jesus is sitting down to a meal with them (Lk. 24:13–35). On another occasion Jesus seems to pass through a closed door to join the Apostles (Jn. 20:26). He eats with them and invites a doubting Thomas, who had been absent on an earlier occasion, to touch his wounds (Jn. 20:27).

The End

Mark and then Luke at greater length write *finis* to the history of Jesus. "And then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God," says the Markan Appendix (Mk. 16:19). Luke writes, "Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up to heaven" (Lk. 24: 50–51).[3]

Muhammad, the Legacy

Muhammad had no need of a resurrection. His miracle had occurred earlier, at the battle of Badr Wells two years after his danger-fraught arrival in Medina. He had been brought to the oasis to resolve its growing civil strife. Instead, his arrival provoked new strife, this between himself and the Jews of Medina who, to all appearances, were living in relative peace, albeit as clients, with the paramount Arab tribes there. There may have been other problems as well: the integration of the new Meccan "Migrants" and their families into the pinched economy of the agricultural settlement.

The Miracle of Badr Wells

Muhammad dealt with the recusant Jews quickly and fiercely. Some of the Medinese Arabs were discomforted at the treatment of their Jewish clients, but if they intended to take action against Muhammad, which seems unlikely, they were soon presented with another, more consuming event. Muhammad's attack and looting of the Meccan caravan traveling homeward through Badr Wells may have been intended to remedy the financial plight of the Migrants, but it was a *casus belli* for the not terribly bellicose date farmers of Medina. The *bellum* came and the Meccans turned out to be as unbellicose as the Medinese and militarily inept in the bargain.

Badr Wells had the making of a disaster for both Muhammad and the Medinese, but it turned out to be something considerably more rewarding. The unexpected and enriching success of what must have appeared as a foolhardy venture was not lost on the Medinese. Muhammad told all who would listen that it was God's inevitable victory against daunting odds (3:121–127). We cannot say how impressed the Medinese date farmers were by the theological argument, but there was no gainsaying the results. The Migrants had left the oasis poor and returned rich.

Muhammad's fortunes began to change immediately after Badr Wells. The Medinese embraced Islam—the Prophet was not always sure of the sincerity of what the Quran calls "the Hypocrites"—and they joined what became annual raids against an ever-widening arc of neighboring settlements. The results were tallied in plunder from those foolish enough to resist and tribute or tithe from those wise enough to read the new writing on the Arabian sands. It was a mighty triumph for a man who had only recently been begging for asylum from his murderously vengeful enemies.

The Death of the Prophet

Muhammad died of an indeterminate illness in 632 A.D., aged 62 by the traditional chronology, but somewhat younger than that by our own informed guess. He had been ill for a while, so his death could not have been unexpected. Yet his companions in faith and arms appear mildly surprised. What is more surprising to us perhaps is that he made no provision whatsoever for his successor. The Quran already describes Muhammad as "the seal" or the last of the prophets (33:40), so in that sense there could be no successor, nor was there for Muslims. But this charismatic "warner" was also the head of a political society that he and the Quran had created, and yet he made no move to signal who should govern it or, indeed, how.

Early on, Muhammad's Meccan audience had demanded miracles of him (17:90–92). He refused. He was, he insisted, merely a mortal (18:110). The Islamic tradition continues to affirm his mortality, particularly in the face of what are in Muslim eyes the extraordinary Christian claims of divinity for Jesus, whose prophethood—and mortality—Muslims freely recognize. And yet, with the passage of time, the stature of Muhammad has grown in its own extraordinary fashion. The once unmiraculous Muhammad has been provided with many miracles, and the earthbound mortal, who had been taught by God to resist the notion of a "ladder to heaven" (17:93), mounted to heaven as surely as Jesus—Jesus to remain there until his distant Second Coming,

Muhammad to return to Mecca and his prophetic career on the very same night that his journey began.

A Man Without Sin

Muslim traditionalists may continue to resist, with diminishing success, the annual celebration of the Prophet's birthday,[4] but Muslim theologians have granted Muhammad, without demur, the gift of impeccability (*'isma*). If Mary's virginity *a parte post* has spread quite remarkably among Christians, so too has the Prophet's impeccability *a parte ante* among Muslims. Despite many indications to the contrary that Muhammad before his call to prophecy participated in the ordinary ritual life of Mecca, the subsequent Muslim tradition would keep him remote from all such.

"A Beautiful Pattern"

It is an easy step from being free of every sin to being the possessor of every virtue, and soon this is the status granted to the Prophet: Muhammad was not only the cosmic Perfect Man of Islamic esotericism; he was also the human embodiment of perfect "submission," and as such, he was a paradigm of human and particularly Muslim behavior.

Like his monotheistic coreligionists, the Muslim derives from the revealed Word of God his general precepts of morality as well as both counsels and detailed prescriptions on behavior. The Quran is addressed in the first instance to all mankind, calling them to goodness, to justice, equity, and particularly righteousness. The message of the Meccan Quran in particular was intended for all who were willing to listen, but as the message and the mission proceeded, the Quran's instruction was increasingly directed to the Muslims who make up the community. Hence, the Quran is both the "Guidance"—a frequent self-characterization—for all humanity and, more precisely, a manual of behavior for the Muslim believer.

The Prophetic Reports

Muhammad himself lies well concealed behind the Quran. But outside the Quran, there is no such reticence. There was in early circulation an enormous body of *hadîth* or "Prophetic reports" that professed to give the Prophet's own moral instruction on almost every conceivable subject and provided vivid vignettes of Muhammad at prayer and at meals, on campaign and *en famille*, as husband, father, judge, statesman, and military strategist.

Though there are personal details in the classical biographical tradition, the works that applied flesh and blood to the portrait belong to a different genre. These latter, called either "The Proofs of Prophecy" or "The Good Qualities (of the Prophet)," are essentially collections of anecdotes, and as such they stand much closer to hagiography than to biography. Like the apocryphal Gospels of the Christian tradition, they present the life of their subject after a fashion, but their chief interest is in his personality, character, appearance, and miracles.

The *Adab* of the Prophet

Tradition provides, then, a fully fleshed-out if at times self-contradictory portrait of the Prophet, and it has served as the template and measure of the

ideal Muslim life. The *hadîth* offer a broad and varied menu of preferred social behavior, of etiquette rather than morality, and that latter notion of etiquette (*adab*) was later integrated into Islamic moral thinking generally. At the outset *adab* was a conservative term in a tribal society: the appropriate behavior was the traditional behavior, and *adab* stood at not too great a remove from *sunna,* "customary behavior." And as it did with *sunna*, the "sending down" of the Quran affected a revolution in *adab.* Tribal etiquette no longer sufficed; in Islam only a Muhammad *adab* would do.

That personal *adab* of the Prophet was handed down to future generations of Muslims through the great body of *hadîth* or Prophetic reports testifying to the sayings and doings of Muhammad. Very many of those sayings have to do with what the Jews call *halakha:* they provide prescriptive guidance in moral matters and as such have been built into the foundations of Islamic law. But a great many more are simply the Prophet's "tabletalk," or perhaps better, his "pillowtalk," since the majority of them come down to us on the testimony of his wife Aisha. In them, and in the anecdotes passed on through the *hadîth*, Islam received a detailed portrait of the Prophet's *adab*. The sketch of Jesus' lifestyle in the Gospels is limited by the brevity of Jesus' public life, the evangelists' staying carefully on message and, in the end, the believer's understanding that Jesus was, after all, the Son of God. Muhammad's humanity was visible to all, however, and more, he was in the public eye for twenty-two years in the most varied of circumstances. The reports on Muhammad, if the authenticity of some of them is doubtful, are nonetheless full and plentiful—full enough, in any event, to provide the believer with a life-scaled and complex model of Muslim *adab.*

One result of this profusion of information about the personal *adab* of the Prophet is that Islamic behavior has a sense of a particular lifestyle not immediately present in either Judaism or Christianity, both of which prefer epigone models, a Francis of Assisi—whose own appropriation of the Jesus *adab* proved unsustainable—or one of the Eastern European *rebbes* who stand behind the Hasidic movement. This Muslim lifestyle is psychologically reinforced, doubtless, by the residual Arabism that rests at the bottom of Muslim identity, but the pervasiveness of the Prophetic *adab* is real enough and apparent in the relentlessly male Muslim society. It is visible in everything from dress and dining to the manner of prayer, particularly the Friday community prayer that is so obviously a common exercise performed in the most exquisite unison and at the same time an unmistakably individual, almost solipsistic, communion with the divine.

Muhammad the Man

Muhammad was, on the face of it, a religious and political genius in that he fashioned, as single-handedly as history allows any individual, both a religious culture and a political society, both of enormous scope, that not only have persisted but are still vital and growing. And the stamp of his personality remains on both. The pacific Jesus has often disappeared behind an exceedingly militant Christianity, but the militant, flexible Muhammad still is at the helm of Islam, and his vigorous yet controlled personality, his personal piety and heroic perseverance remain at the center of Muslim character.

If we narrow the focus somewhat, a distinct and complex personality emerges, a man who is neither the devil of Christian polemic nor the saint of Muslim hagiography. Politically Muhammad was relentless, even ruthless; pragmatic rather than an ideologue, but unbending on the core values of Islam; thin-skinned to a fault, quick to blame and equally quick to forgive; possessed of piety but the very antithesis of pious; famously uxorious yet married, monogamously, to the same woman for twenty-four years: she the mother of all his surviving children and they only daughters in a society that valued male heirs above all else; excessive in little besides energy and profound conviction; and generous, always generous.

There is far too much evidence on Muhammad: the "Prophetic reports are a limitless sea of information, all of it professing to have come down from reliable eyewitnesses, but much if not most of it doubtlessly invented, from which the interested party may fashion whatever portrait suits the occasion or one's own persuasion. It was probably so from the very beginning and it will doubtless continue to be so for as long as the extraordinary edifice that he fathered stands.

---

1. By nearly unanimous consent, Mark's Gospel originally ended somewhat awkwardly at 16:8 with the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb. Verses 9–19 of that same chapter, which describe Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, are then an addition by a later hand.
2. Jn. 21 has been added. Jn. 20 ends (30–31) with what is manifestly a formal literary conclusion to the Gospel.
3. Luke describes the final scene with the Twelve once again, and with added details, in the Acts of the Apostles: ". . . he was lifted up before their very eyes, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were gazing intently into the sky as he went, and all at once there stood beside them two men robed in white, who said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand there looking up into the sky? This Jesus who was taken from you up to heaven will come in the same way as you have seen him go" (Acts 1:9–11).
4. It is in part the improper exaltation of the mortal Muhammad that is being fought, in part the parallel to the Christians' Christmas. Where there has been greater success is in discouraging Westerners from calling Islam "Muhammadanism" on the analogy of Christianity.
5. The Arabic word *dallan* here translated as "wandering" usually refers, like the Latin *errare*, to being wrong or mistaken. The "Guidance" is of course another common self-designation of the Quran.

Questions

1. Why might Q have not mentioned Jesus' resurrection?
2. What is a result of the profusion of information about the personal *adab* of Muhammad?

Lecture 14:
Further Thoughts on Jesus and Muhammad

We have taken a long and rather detailed look at our two holy men who were separated by nearly one thousand miles of geography and six hundred years of human history. The differences are less great than they seem, however. Both men lived in somewhat similar pre-industrial eco-zones, and if Jesus' Jewish society seems somewhat higher on the socio-economic scale, it was nonetheless the same scale. Muhammad's was the more mercantile; Jesus' the more agricultural.

Two Different Worlds

Jesus and Muhammad were open-air preachers in an open-air society. They and their audiences were products of an oral culture, though literacy was undoubtedly higher in Jesus' milieu. The foundation document of Jesus' Jewish society was the written Torah, and scribes are everywhere on the Gospels' landscape. Seventh-century Mecca had no documents we can discern; it functioned on tradition and *sunna*, the customary practice of those who had gone before and the survival manual of a marginal society.

In Jesus' day the Jews were governed by a literary tradition that provided them with both a unified view of the past, the world's history that stretched back to Creation, and of their own narrow trajectory through it. As Israel, they were a single people with a well-illuminated past and a guaranteed, and even triumphant, future. No such picture emerges from the Quran. The light that illuminated Mecca was dim and fitful: its history was narrowly tribal and parochial. Meccans were tied to each other by kinship alone and perhaps by attachment to parochial tutelary deities. Blood ties eased the passages of life; blood feuds strangled them.

First-century Palestine was a land of cities as well as villages. Jesus walked down streets where some passersby were reading Plato and Homer, and he preached in public venues where some of the listeners might have served with Roman legions in Germany or Britain. The company in the narrow lanes of Mecca were either local shrine magnates or Bedouin who had come in from the steppe to worship their stone idols and barter with the local merchants or slaves from across the Red Sea in Abyssinia. The chief cultural actors in Muhammad's birthplace were the oral poet-bards who stand somewhere between Homeric "singers of tales," in this instance, tales of the "battle days of the Arabs," and the more shaman-like figures, the *kahins*, whose inspired incantations opened a window into *al-ghayb*, the "hidden world" of the supernatural.

New Testament and the Quran

Jesus and Muhammad are found in two collective works that do not exactly reflect the milieu from which either man came. Jesus is in the New Testament but it is not his work. The Gospels in particular are the product of a later generation of men living in a wider and more spacious world. Muhammad is not in the Quran but he is certainly behind it: it is his work. But it reflects Mecca only obliquely. Its historical gaze is on a remote but eternal prophetic past that unfolds across an anonymous landscape. It does not tell us a great deal

about the beliefs and practices of the Meccans because it wishes not so much to reform as to obliterate them.

There are two different epistemic systems at work in the New Testament and the Quran. With the Quran the secular historian starts with the premise that it is the voice of Muhammad he is hearing through the received text. The Muslims who were responsible for transmitting that received text, and perhaps the very earliest believers who created the Quran as a text, believed no such thing. They heard the all-but-immediate voice of God.

In the case of Jesus, the historian, whether Christian or not, recognizes from the outset that he is dealing with texts that had human authors, whose very names stand in fact at the heads of the texts that constitute the New Testament. The investigative premise is that the texts, particularly the Gospels, report the teachings (and acts) of another human personage, namely Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian immediately adds that that same Jesus was also the Son of God and so what was proceeding from his lips was the reported speech of God. It was not, however, the words of Yahweh heard and reported by Moses from Sinai or the words of Allah pronounced by Muhammad in Mecca and Medina; this was a revolutionary new discourse, the words of a God-man, a human voice with the gravity of the divine.

The Message

Jesus and Muhammad both professed to announce the "Good News" and the content of their messages is quite similar, up to a point. Both men were warners, and the warning that they issued was, "Repent/Change your life, for the Kingdom/Judgment is at hand." But there are critical differences. Jesus' vision of the End Time centers on the Kingdom, the imperial rule of God. The Final State is preceded by chaos and struggle, but it will yield to a familiar Jewish Eden of the Elect of Israel, the Assembly of the Faithful, in which Jesus (and the Twelve) will play an operative role. And Jesus' resurrection introduces the believers' participation in that state, which was parsed in that world as immortality. In the Quran, on the other hand, the End Time centers on, first, the Judgment—this is what the "warning" is all about—and then, the punishments and rewards of the Final State. And it is the individual who stands before God; the *umma*, the community of believers that plays such an important role in Muslim life, all but disappears in the End Time.

The message resonated differently in the two different milieus. Jesus positioned himself in the footsteps of a contemporary predecessor so closely that his followers had to go to some lengths to separate them. Muhammad had no John the Baptist—he was absolutely novel in his context, though not, his listeners thought, in the form of his message. He was using the poetic idiom and perhaps the mantic manner of the Arab bards.

Jesus' own message was not unfamiliar. Though he often sounded like John, his listeners could look behind Jesus and even the Baptist and readily identify both Moses and Elijah as his prophetic prototypes. Muhammad insistently recalled and/or constructed his own identity as a "warner" by frequent and detailed references to the prophets, a chiefly biblical, monotheistic tradition. Muhammad did not have an apocalyptic literary tradition to provide him and his listeners with a repertoire of images and motives to undergird his message of the Last Days.

In the Quran, the images of the End Time are as vivid as those in the Gospels, but as far as we can tell, Muhammad's audience was hearing them for the first time. Jesus' descriptions are embedded in a deep and rich Jewish environment. Muhammad was speaking to pagan idolaters from whom he had made a profound break—"My religion is not your religion." His words have a discernible context, a biblical one that we can see quite clearly and explicitly through the lines of the Quran. There is an enigma here: his listeners too seem to understand that same biblical context that Muhammad refers to without much explanation. We have no idea how either he or they came by such information. But Muhammad's Bible, it should be remarked, was prophetic but not yet apocalyptic. The Jews' own apocalyptic imagination was not biblical; it was chiefly expressed in the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha of the post-Exilic era.

The Roles

Jesus' primary role in the Christian faith was that of redeemer. But the Son of God was also a son of man, which also possessed its literal resonance of *bar adam*, a human. It was perfectly natural, then, that Jesus should become the exemplary model for all Christians. It was not exactly so, however. The two primary images of Jesus were, in the Eastern Church, *Christos pantokrator*, Christ Regnant, lord of the world enthroned in majesty, and in the West, Jesus crucified, the vilified servant hanging ignominiously on the cross. The first elicited awe, the second loving gratitude; neither suggested emulation. The Church found its models elsewhere: in the early martyrs and later in the "confessors," whose lives were marked by extraordinary self-denial and self-abnegation.

Muhammad was more genuinely "in all things like us"—there was no mirror-image Godhead to either outshine or overmaster his humanity—-though Muslim piety attempted, quite successfully, to add its own disclaimer of "sin alone excepted." More, the canonical portrait of Muhammad suffered none of the narrative thinness of the Gospels' account of Jesus' three scant years of reported ministry.

Comparing Incomparables

For their respective believers, there is an element that renders all further comparisons of Jesus and Muhammad irrelevant. As the Christians began to believe, and continue to affirm, Jesus was divine, the Son of God. As such he has no place in strictly human history. Christians, as the Jews before them, embraced the notion that God crosses the metaphysical divide and intervenes in human history.

God in History

The Israelites were a historical people who constituted both a state and a culture. God's creation of the universe was a broad and imaginatively inspiring concept, but God's adoption of the Israelites was an *operative principle* that determined almost every facet of life from the economy and foreign policy of the Israelite state to the diet and sex life of the ordinary Israelite family.

Thus God condescended to enter human history. The terms of that intervention were in the Covenant and the proof was in history, from divinely promoted triumph in the Exodus to divinely provoked tragedy in the exile. Nor did His intervention end with the Covenant. The Covenant was interpreted and compliance encouraged by the prophets.

The Hypostases

It was thought by many Jews that Jesus was just such, a prophet communicating God's will to Israel. But there were other models of God-in-the-world, and Jesus suggested some of those elements as well. God's "Word" (*Logos*) and God's "Wisdom" (*Sophia*) and God's "Spirit" or "Life Breath" (*Pneuma*) all had currency among Jesus' contemporaries and their immediate ancestors. And in his followers' and others' eyes, Jesus of Nazareth might be thought to represent one or another of them.

The Word Made Flesh

John's verse 14 says, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus never says that of himself, but he asserts the same reality: he is the "son" of that same divine Father. "Son" is another somewhat more homely Jewish way of expressing God's activity in the world, and Jesus embraces it fully and unmistakably: "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30).

No Jew had ever claimed to have witnessed the "Word" or the "Wisdom" or the "Son" of God in the flesh. Jesus claimed just that, and not "in the likeness of" a man, but an actual human male who was born and died. How precisely God could be a man or man could be God was something that troubled neither Jesus nor his first followers; later generations would have to wrestle with those notions.

Jesus represented, then, a startling new dimension in the monotheists' conviction that God intervened in history, so startling in fact that it was not, and is not, accepted by those other two branches of the monotheistic family, the Jews and the Muslims. The Gospels flirt with the notion that Jesus is another Moses, and the Quran and the entire Muslim tradition is even more insistent on the Moses-Muhammad resemblance. But Moses and Muhammad were "sons of God" only in a metaphorical or derived sense; Jesus was literally so.

In their role of prophetic "warners," Jesus and Muhammad both fit comfortably, and so comparably, into the biblical tradition of prophecy that is well rehearsed in both the Gospels and the Quran. Their inspired pronouncements represent God "speaking Human" to His creation, not in his own somewhat embarrassingly anthropomorphic voice, but through his chosen and obviously human translators. Thus Jesus, as it turns out, is not merely the messenger, but also the message. His life is God's revelation; his acts are God's intervention in history. So were Moses' actions in directing the exodus from Egypt and Joshua's in leading the conquest of Canaan and Muhammad's in achieving victory at Badr Wells. But all three were acting on behalf of God, as God's instruments. Jesus was acting on his own behalf. At Golgotha he was not playing Isaac to God's Abraham: it was his own self-sacrificial death that achieved atonement and redemption for humankind. Muhammad was the conduit of human salvation; Jesus was its instrument.

Questions

1. How do the roles of Jesus and Muhammad in their respective faiths differ?
2. In what manner are Jesus and Muhammad different conduits of human salvation?

Suggested Readings for This Course:

The Glorious Qur'an. 1st English ed. Trans. M.W. Pickthall. Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2000.

Miller, Robert J. *The Complete Gospels*. 3rd rev. ed. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995.

Peters, F.E. *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994.

Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Translated by John Bowden, J.R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and W. Montgomery. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001 (previous editions: 1906, 1913, 1950).

Witherington, Ben. *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

These books are available online through www.modernscholar.com or by calling Recorded Books at 1-800-636-3399.

The long quests for Jesus and Muhammad have been recorded in some detail, particularly that for Jesus since it has been the subject of considerable argument. It can be joined in progress in Marcus Borg's *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994); Ben Witherington's *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995); Luke Timothy Johnson's *The True Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); and finally James D.G. Dunn's *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

The Muhammad quest, which is considerably less high-spirited, is also less caught up in reports of its own progress, perhaps because there has been so little; see, however, Clinton Bennett's *In Search of Muhammad* (New York: Cassell, 1998, pp. 93–138: "Non-Muslim Lives: From the Renaissance to Today").

The evolving, and highly polemical, Christian view of Muhammad is traced in detail in Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993). The comparative treatment by Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), is also useful for the present purpose. And the surprisingly rich trove of Jesus' sayings, which are revealing of Muslim attitudes, though of no demonstrable historical value for Jesus himself, is presented by Tarif Khalidi in *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

The Jesus Sources

The sources on Jesus can be approached from the direction of either their availability and content as plainly stated in James D.G. Dunn's *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1985), or the historiographical method to be used on them and densely argued in Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter's *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 2002), or, more generally, in a combination of the two.

Two of the most complete overviews and differing analyses of the literary sources on the historical Jesus are those in John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 41–195), and John Dominic Crossan, who is much more inclined than Meier to admit the so-called apocryphal Gospels into evidence in his *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). An even wider net is cast over the Gospel genre by Helmut Koester in *Ancient Christian Gospels, Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). The effect of this latter approach, seconded by the Jesus Seminar, is visible in the broad range of "gospels" presented in Robert J. Miller's *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*, rev. ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1994).

The Muhammad Sources: The Qur'an

The best single introduction to the Qur'an as both Scripture and a document remains W. Montgomery Watt's *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), though with important considerations proposed in Neal Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003). The most skeptical and influential statement on the entire Quranic tradition is doubtless the studies of John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* [foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin] (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), and John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

There are now new research tools for the study of the Qur'an. First and foremost is Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, 5 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001–2006 [hereafter identified as *EQ*]), and the single-volume work edited by Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), both to be supplemented by Oliver Leaman's, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Andrew Rippin's, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006); and Gabriel Said Reynolds's *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

The Narrative Sources on Muhammad

The critical issues in the narrative sources on Muhammad are treated in many of the articles reprinted in Uri Rubin's, ed., *The Life of Muhammad* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 1998) and Ibn Warraq's, ed., *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000). Important too is M.J. Kister's "The Sira Literature" in A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G.R. Smith's, eds., *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 352–367) and John Wansbrough's skeptical look at Ibn Ishaq's *Sira* in his *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* [foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Gerald Hawting] (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006).

The standard medieval biography of the Prophet is available in English in Alfred Guillaume's *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955). Guillaume's own introduction there to Ibn Ishaq, his predecessor, and successors (ibid., pp. xiii–xlvii) is both useful and informative.

Jesus' Words

Intensive work on the sayings source Q has now been going on for more than twenty years and latecomers can conveniently join the dialogue with the convinced in either Arland D. Jacobson's *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1992) or Burton L. Mack's *The Lost Gospel*: *The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) or John S. Kloppenborg's *Excavating Q: The*

History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 2000). For quite another view of Q, one should consult John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 43–44, 134–137).

Authenticating the contents of the sayings sources and of Jesus' words in the Gospels is a complex matter and the most specific and notorious attempt at separating the authentic from the imagined or invented is doubtless the color-coded results published in Robert W. Funk, Roy A. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar's *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993).

The notably skeptical findings of the Jesus Seminar were not greeted with universal acclaim: see Ben Witherington's *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995, "Jesus the Talking Head," pp. 42–57) and Luke Timothy Johnson's *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, "The Good News and the Nightly News," pp. 1–27).

Muhammad's Words

The approach to the living voice of Muhammad has paused, or stalled, on the threshold of the work that preserves and presents it, the Qur'an. The work can be addressed as both a text and as product; see the studies collected in Andrew Rippin's, ed., *The Qur'an: Style and Contents* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 2001), but what is far more problematic is an understanding of its composition and construction; see Fred McGraw Donner's "The Qur'an in Recent Research—Challenges and Desideratra" in Gabriel Said Reynolds's *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 29–50) and Gerald Böwering's "Reconstructing the Qur'an: Emerging Insights" (ibid., pp. 70–87).

There is a major clue in the Qur'an's own admission that Muhammad was identified—an identification he denied—as a mantic poet, which we can further gloss as an oral mantic poet, a notion thoroughly unpacked by Michael Zwettler in "A Mantic Manifesto: The *Sura* of 'the Poets' and the Quranic Foundations of Prophetic Authority" in James L. Kugel's, ed., *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 75–119) and further resumed in Alan Jones's "Poetry and Poets" in *EQ*, Vol. 4 (pp. 110–114).

The Itinerant Preacher

There is no doubt that the Jesus whose Galilean career is described in the Gospels may be accurately described as an itinerant preacher who taught by both aphorism and parable, but who also possessed a strong charismatic appeal and the undoubted ability to work wonders. Most modern portraits depict him as such; Martin Hengel's *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1996) is a classic example. Where the

assessments differ, and quite radically, is on what Jesus was teaching. Here the great divide opens over the preferred sources. Those who lean heavily, or predominantly, or exclusively on the sayings sources Q and Thomas regard Jesus as essentially an itinerant preacher with a message of social reform, though possibly with political overtones and almost certainly with political consequences. These are the views, for example, of the Jesus Seminar, which is not really certain about anything Jesus said (see *Five Gospels* above), or did—see Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar's *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) and, with varying nuances of Burton L. Mack's *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); and Marcus Borg's *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

Kingdom and Miracles

On the "Kingdom" of Jesus' message, there is a complete treatment of the subject in John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 237–508, with a bibliography, pp. 272–273); see also Bruce Chilton's, ed., *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1984) and "The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion" in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans's *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Boston: Brill Academic, 1994, pp. 255–280). Particularly influential on modern discussions have been C.H. Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961) and the works of Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) and *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

John Meier has devoted a similar degree of careful detail to the miracles of Jesus in *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 509–1038, with a bibliography, pp. 522–524).

Muhammad in Mecca

Muhammad's prophetic career at Mecca is covered in considerable, if not always convincing, detail in the Ibn Hisham version of Ibn Ishaq, available in English in Ibn Ishaq's *The Life of Muhammad* (London: Folio Society, 2003 [1955]); *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, with introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 109–218); and in al-Tabari's version in *The History of al-Tabari, Volume VI: Muhammad at Mecca*, translated and annotated by W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 60–152). These are the materials that form the basis of modern treatments like W. Montgomery Watt's still standard *Muhammad at Mecca*

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), in Frants Buhl and Alford T. Welch's "Muhammad" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968, pp. 360–376); "The Prophet's Life and Career" and the Meccan chapters of Maxime Rodinson's *Mohammed* (London: Penguin, 1971, pp. 69–148) and my own *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994, pp. 133–166).

The Last Days

The Meccan *sûras* of the Quran paint a number of graphic pictures of the Judgment and the Afterlife, with its punishments and rewards; see Jane I. Smith's "Eschatology" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe's, ed., *EQ*, vol. 2, 2002, pp. 44–54; Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes in the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994, pp. 106–120), which had their own elaborate afterlife among the Muslim commentators. A sample of this is in Helmut Gätje's *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996 [1978], pp. 172–186). The sequence begins with the death of the believer, see Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad's *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981) with its development in later exegesis, and includes vivid portraits of Jahannam, see R. Gwynne's "Hell and Hellfire" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe's, ed., *EQ*, vol. 2, pp. 414–420; Stefan Wild's "Hell" in Oliver Leaman's, ed., *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 259–263) and "'The Garden' or Paradise," Josef Horovitz, "Das koranische Paradies" (Jerusalem, 1923; reprint: Paret, *Der Koran*, 1975, pp. 53–73); Stefan Wild's art. "Heaven" in Oliver Leaman's, ed., *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 258–259).

The Prophets of God

This threatening posture as a warner is transformed—but never quite replaced—in the evolving Qur'an by another approach. Muhammad located himself in the history of revelation and, more specifically, in the line of God-sent prophets that had begun with Adam and was now coming to its climax, and its end, with him. See Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 80–105) and a full treatment in Uri Rubin's "Prophets and Prophethood" in Andrew Rippin's, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 234–247).

Behind this is Muhammad's understanding of God, his will, and his work in the world. Like all other such larger concepts, it unfolds piecemeal in the Qur'an as circumstances and inclination dictate. The data have been assembled by Fazlur Rahman in *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 1–16) and "God" in Andrew Rippin's, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 223–233). And there is as well man's place in the scheme of the divine economy traced, from two very different perspectives by Fazlur Rahman in *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 17–36) and Toshihiko Izutsu in *God and Man in the Koran* (Tokyo: Keio Institute, 1964).

"Command the Right, Forbid the Wrong"

The individual does not stand alone before God; he has a life in society and the Qur'an lays down a simple but powerful imperative from which the entirety of Muslim morality depends: "Command the good and forbid the wrong" (Q 3:104, 110; 9:71, a verse that explicitly includes women in those bound). But it does not often spell out either the modalities of the command or explicit examples of its application; see A. Kevin Reinhart's "Ethics in the Qur'an" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *EQ*, vol. 2, pp. 55–78. That fell to Islam's prodigious legal tradition, as described in detail by Michael Cook in *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and more summarily in his *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The Qur'an does descend to moral particulars at times, on the believers' duties toward God, like prayer, fasting, tithing, and the pilgrimage or hajj, whose Quranic occurrences are underlined by W. Montgomery Watt's *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, pp. 162–164). There are more earthly concerns as well in what the Qur'an offers not as advice, but as prescriptive legislation: marriage and divorce, inheritance, food laws, wine-drinking, usury; see W. Montgomery Watt's *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, pp. 164-166) and the regulation of a broad range of sexual practices as surveyed in Khaleel Mohammed's "Sex, Sexuality and the Family" in Andrew Rippin's, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 298–307).

Jesus in Jerusalem

Just as he covered the Infancy Narratives in all their details, Raymond Brown has devoted an even more ambitious study to a good part of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem: *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave, Volume One: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, with complete sectional bibliographies on each element of the narrative). Brown's account is sober and balanced but it represents a traditional view of the proceedings of those few days. Quite other is the presentation of John Dominic Crossan in *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), which was written before Raymond Brown's *Who Killed Jesus: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). Brown deals with Crossan, or rather, Crossan's source, the Gospel of Peter, in *The Death of the Messiah*, pp. 1317–1349, and Crossan, who defines their difference as "history remembered" (Brown's view of the passion narrative) versus "prophecy historicized" (his own judgment on it), in *Who Killed Jesus*, pp. 1–38: "History and Prophecy."

Muhammad in Medina

Muhammad's migration cast him into a new environment, the oasis culture of Medina, and both the town and its people have been intensively studied by Michael Lecker in the studies collected in his *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans:*

Studies on Early Islamic Medina (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) and *People, Tribes, and Society in Arabia Around the Time of Muhammad* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2005). Initially at least, Muhammad's role there was governed by an apparently written document called the "Medina Accords" or, less properly, the "Constitution of Medina," and it has been studied at length by R.B. Serjeant, "The Sunnah Jami'ah, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews and the Tahrim of Yathrib, Analysis and Translation of the . . . Constitution of Medina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978), pp. 1–42, and with emphasis on community formation by Frederick Denny in "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977), pp. 39–47.

Soon after his arrival in Medina Muhammad engaged with the Jewish tribes there. Their mutual interaction, which is reflected in the Qur'an (Uri Rubin, "Jews and Judaism" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *EQ*, vol. 3, pp. 21–34), has attracted much attention, both medieval and modern. This matter was studied in detail by A.J. Wensinck in *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina* (Freiburg, Germany: Klaus Schwartz, 1975), but there are now more detailed studies like that of Michael Lecker, "A Jew with Two Side-Locks: Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Yathrib (Medina)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56 (1997), pp. 259–273, which discusses the tradition of Jewish literacy there. Lecker has also studied the political conflict in his "Did Muhammad Conclude Treaties with the Jewish Tribes Nadir, Qurayza, and Qaynuqa?" (*Israel Oriental Studies* 17 (1997), pp. 29–36), as had earlier M.J. Kister in "The Massacre of the Banu Qurayza: A Re-Examination of a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, pp. 61–96; and see, from a Muslim perspective, Barakat Ahmad's *Muhammad and the Jews: A Re-Examination* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980).

A Community in Arms

Though later generations, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, found much else to interest them there, the authors on the Prophet's biography structured it, as we have seen, around the continuous raids (*maghazi*) he mounted from the ambush at Badr Wells down to the year of his death. The legitimacy of these, and the more general issue of the use of force, arose even before Muhammad left Mecca: see, for example, Fred McGraw Donner's *The Early Conquests* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 2008 [1981], pp. 55–62) and Reuven Firestone's *The Origin of Holy War in the Religious Civilization of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 13–98). But his biographers had no problems with the spread of Muslim sovereignty through the use of arms; see Fred McGraw Donner's *The Early Conquests* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 2008 [1981], pp. 62–82); Reuven Firestone's *The Origin of Holy War in the Religious Civilization of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 105–126) and Rizwi Faizer's "Expeditions and Battles" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *EQ* vol. 2, pp. 143–153.

Jesus' Resurrection

Raymond Brown's *Death of the Messiah* ends with the burial of Jesus, which may mark the limits of the historical Jesus narrative. But Brown did have his say on Jesus' resurrection, significantly coupled with another miraculous event, in his *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New

York: Paulist Press, 1973, pp. 69–130). But the full range of interest in the resurrection and the variety of opinions about it are more graphically illustrated in four collections of essays devoted to the resurrection of Jesus: Stephen T. Davis's, ed., *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); S.E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs's, eds., *Resurrection* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); S. Barton and G. Stanton's, eds., *Resurrection: Essays in Honor of Leslie Houlden* (London: SPCK, 1994); and Robert B. Steward's, ed., *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), where there is more to learn than merely the views of the two engaging principals.

Muhammad, the Legacy

The description of the last illness and death of the Prophet has apparently been pared down in Ibn Hisham's version of the *Sira* (Ibn Ishaq's *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, with introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 678–683) since al-Tabari presents us with a far more complex collection of reports in *The History of al-Tabari, Volume IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, translated and annotated by W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, pp. 162–188), all of which have been harmonized by Martin Lings's *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, rev. ed. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006 [1983], pp. 337–341).

What later Muslims thought of Muhammad is already expressed in the *Sira* tradition, but it is often cued in the Qur'an. This was certainly the case with its pointing to Muhammad as "a beautiful model" (33:21) or excellent exemplar of human behavior. The development of that notion from the appearance of *hadîth* on the subject to collections of such into free-standing works devoted to the virtues of the Prophet is traced by Annemarie Schimmel in *And Muhammad Is His Prophet: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, pp. 24–55). There the development was largely anecdotal, but the same or similar notion gave birth to a doctrine which soon developed, as we have seen, into a dogma, that of the impeccability (*'isma*) of the Prophet; see A.J. Wensinck's *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass, 1968, pp. 217–218).

"Impeccability" was a matter for the theologians, but the events, real or legendary, in the life of Muhammad was the stuff of popular piety. Nowhere is this clearer than in the celebrations, narratives, and liturgies that developed around the birth, and hence, with a clear assist from the Christians' Christmas, the birthday of the Prophet (*mawlid* or *milad al-nabi*) on the twelfth of I Rabi'. Annemarie Schimmel's *And Muhammad Is His Prophet: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, pp. 144–158) made a preliminary sketch of its celebration, but now there is Marion Holmes Katz's *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007), and compare Fadwa el Guindi's "Mawlid" in John Esposito's, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1995, pp. 79–82).