

CHRISTIANITY

The Carpenter's Son

A modern narrative biography of Jesus of Nazareth, written for this site rather than translated from an ancient source. Drawing on the Gospels, Josephus, Roman and Jewish primary sources, and current historical scholarship, it reconstructs the world of first-century Galilee and Judea -- the village economy, the Roman occupation, the movement Jesus gathered, and the week that ended in his execution -- while carefully distinguishing what the evidence supports from where it runs out. Illustrated throughout with historical maps and plans of Galilee, Jerusalem, and the Temple precinct.

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Part One: The World That Made Him

Author's Note

This is a historical biography. It is not a sermon, not a polemic, and not a contribution to the argument about whether Jesus of Nazareth is the risen Lord of the Christian church. It is an attempt to say what the historical evidence allows us to say about a man who lived and died in the first century, and what that evidence does not allow us to say.

The stance of the book is historical, warmly human, and aggressively non-partisan. It does not argue for or against the resurrection. It reports, precisely and respectfully, what people said happened, when they said it, and what historians can and cannot establish. Then it gets out of the way. Miracles receive the same treatment: something happened around this man that people described as healing, and the book describes the reports, the ancient context of healers and exorcists, and the honest limits of the evidence. It does not sneer and it does not vouch.

Jesus was a Jew who lived and died a Jew, inside Jewish arguments, and never founded a religion. This is not a conclusion the book pushes toward; it is the frame that opens it and the frame that runs through every chapter of the book's middle and end. Getting this right is most of what separates an honest popular biography from the usual one.

The Gospels are our best sources, and they are *interested* sources written decades later by people making a case. Both halves of that sentence stay true all book long. The book teaches the reader to read the Gospels the way a historian does — gently, as we go, never in a lecture.

The controlling question, asked in chapter one and answered by the last page, is this: how does a nobody from a village of four hundred people become the most consequential human being who ever lived — and what was it actually like to be him while it was happening?

The answer is not a single sentence, and it does not resolve itself neatly. It is a set of things the reader can say with genuine confidence, and a set of things the reader cannot. The book has tried to hold both, and to end without a bow.

No book like this is written alone. The author-reader relationship here is a covenant of honesty: the reader lends their trust, the book returns nothing but what the evidence supports. Where the evidence is thin, the book says so. Where the sources disagree, the book says so. Where the uncomfortable finding of modern scholarship is that Jesus seems to have expected God to act soon, the book says so without flinching and without editorialising.

The book's debt is to the scholars whose work made this reconstruction possible — the historians, archaeologists, and textual experts who have spent their lives recovering the world of first-century Galilee and Judea and the figure who walked through it. Their names appear in the Further Reading. Their work is the ground this book stands on, and the reader who wants to go further will find the path there.

The reader who begins this book as a believer may finish it with the ground shifted under their feet, because the book has said things that do not always fit the inherited picture. The reader who begins the book as a sceptic may finish it with the ground shifted under their feet, because the book has said things that do not always fit the dismissive picture. The book has tried to be neither a sermon nor a sceptical dismissal. It has tried to be a historical biography, honest about its limits.

The limits are not a failure. They are the condition of the subject. A historical biography of Jesus of Nazareth can do what no sermon can do and what no sceptical dismissal can do: it can say what the sources allow and what they do not, without treating the limits as a failure. The carpenter's son from Nazareth — the builder from a village of four hundred, the Jew who walked into the Judean countryside and changed the world — is worth knowing for himself, as a man, before the world organised itself around him. That is what this book has tried to give the reader.

A Village of Four Hundred

There is a parish church in Nazareth today, built over a grotto that tradition has identified as the place associated with Jesus' childhood home. Whether the identification is correct is not something the tradition settles and not something archaeology can confirm. The grotto beneath it is small enough that two people standing close together would have to turn sideways to pass. The stone walls are rough, the ceiling low, the air cool and still. If you stand in it and imagine a man who lived there, you will not imagine anything like the Jesus of the great paintings: not the golden halo, not the serene upward gaze, not the figure made of light and distance. You will imagine someone who knew the weight of a clay water-jar carried up a slope in the morning, the grit of limestone dust on a builder's hands, the smell of woodsmoke from a neighbour's chimney on a still evening, the particular exhaustion of a body that has been working since before the light changed.

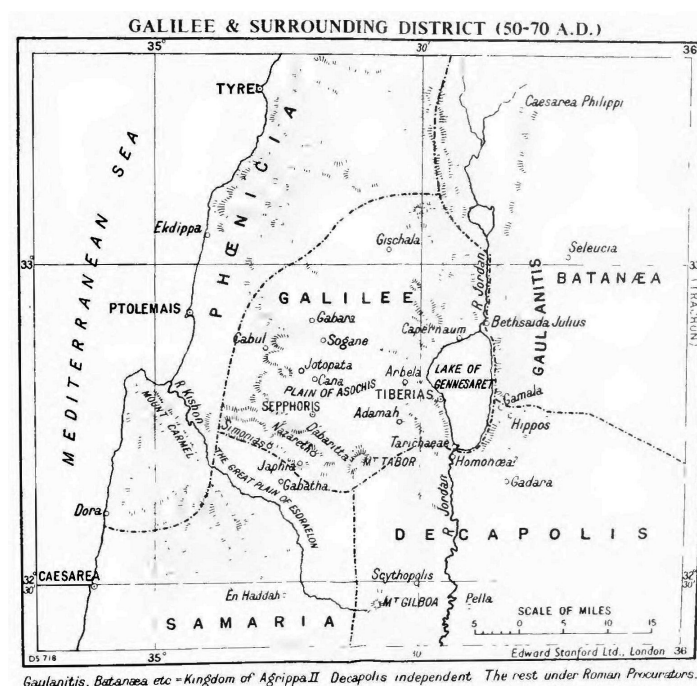
The village he grew up in was smaller than that church's shadow. Almost certainly smaller. The usual estimate runs to around four hundred people — a number that carries the right feel even if the exact reckoning is impossible, and which is more useful for what it implies than for its precision. A village of four hundred is not a hamlet, but it is not a town either. Everyone knows everyone. If a stranger walks in, three people notice by lunchtime. If a family falls into debt, the whole village feels the strain by the next harvest. If a young man starts walking out of the village and not coming back, people will talk about it at the well and at the roadside and at the meal-table, and they will talk about it for the rest of their lives.

Nazareth in the middle of the first century had no synagogue we can find. That is worth sitting with for a moment, because the sentence means something different than it sounds. It does not mean there was no place of worship, and it does not mean the people of the village were without the religious life that structured everything else around them. It means that when we look for a building with a name on it, a foundation we can date, an inscription that says *here the sabbath is kept*, we come up empty-handed. The village was small enough that its Jewish life may have been conducted in a house, or in the open air, or in the kind of informal gathering that leaves no trace in the archaeological record and therefore no trace for us. What we can say is that the village was too small to have the kind of institutional presence that larger settlements did, and that the people in it

belonged to the same world of Torah and Temple and Sabbath that every Jewish community in the region shared.

It had no pavement. The road to the village — if you can call a track a road — ran over the limestone of the region, uneven underfoot, dusty in the long dry season and sticky in the rains. The hills around it are terraced: the slope eaten into a hundred levels by generations of farmers who needed flat ground for vines and olives and the summer crops that paid the taxes. A terrace is a kind of labour that compounds across generations — your grandfather's wall holds the soil for your vines, and your children will inherit the wall as well as the vines, and a broken wall is a problem you inherit from a dead man. The village sat inside that economy of inherited labour, and everyone in it understood, without anyone needing to say it, that the ground beneath them had been worked by people they would never meet and would someday be worked by people they would never meet either.

It had no coins minted in its name. None of the small local coinage that marked a town as a place worth marking. If you paid for something in Nazareth, you paid with the currency that came through the region — the denarius or the drachma or the shekel, depending on what you were buying and who you were buying it from. No local authority had decided that this place was worth stamping into metal and passing around. This is a small fact but it is the kind of small fact that tells you something real: the village was normal in the sense that it did not insist on being noticed.



Lower Galilee in the first century: Nazareth on its ridge, Sepphoris four miles north. (Map: Edward Stanford Ltd., 1927
Loeb Josephus edition; public domain.)

The house you might have grown up in would not have been anything the modern eye would call a house in any grand sense. One or two rooms, a courtyard, a courtyard-kitchen combination where the daily life happened — the grinding of grain, the cooking, the sorting of lentils from gravel, the mending of a neighbour's ploughshare that had bent on a rocky patch of ground. The floor would have been packed earth or rough stone. If you were a *tektōn* — and in this family, that seems to have been the trade — your work-space was not a workshop in the modern sense either. It was wherever

the work happened: a site in the neighbouring town of Sepphoris, four miles down the road, where a landlord was building something that needed hands; a stretch of road being repaired; a threshing floor being laid; the family's own courtyard when someone had commissioned a beam, a doorframe, a trough. The word does not mean carpenter in the romantic sense that later tradition lent it, the man communing with the grain of wood in a quiet room. It means builder. It means a person who works with his hands on material that has to hold weight and take weather and not fail when someone depends on it. A *tektōn* could work stone or wood or both, and in a place like Galilee in the time of Herod and his successors, both were always in demand.

The economy of the village was not the economy of money in any simple sense. It was the economy of obligations, and those ran on a scale that money only partially captured. You owed your neighbour for the help with the olive harvest. You owed the landowner for the land you worked. You owed the tax collector, and the tax collector's rôle was to extract from you in a way that left the village with enough to survive the next year and not enough to thrive in it. The days were divided by the work that the seasons demanded, and the Jewish calendar that structured those seasons was not a private matter. The Sabbath was a real interruption to labour, a real claim that the week belonged to God as well as to the work that kept you alive, and a man who broke it without good reason would have been answerable to more than his own conscience. The festivals — Passover, the various pilgrimage moments — pulled people toward Jerusalem in numbers that changed the city's population and changed the political temperature of the province. If you lived in Nazareth and never went to Jerusalem, you still felt the effect of the people who did: the taxes collected for the Temple, the news that travelled back, the way a relative who had gone up for the feast came home with stories and sometimes with trouble.

If you were one of a large family in that village, and your family did not own land, your life was not the life of a peasant who watched his own olive trees grow and inherited his father's plot. It was the life of a family whose survival depended on finding daily work, on the demand from the building projects elsewhere in the region, on whether the drought came or did not come, on whether the disease that took the goats took the children as well. The brothers and sisters named in Mark's Gospel suggest a household of a size that would have been normal in Galilee and would have been a source of constant labour: several children, a mother whose work was not finished when the sun went down, a father whose hands were shaped by the work he did. Joseph is not a prominent figure in the Gospels after the early stories; he does not appear in the ministry. What that silence means is something we cannot know with certainty, and the honest answer is that it might mean he died sometime in the years between the childhood stories and the beginning of the public life, leaving the family with less security than it had before. It might mean that he had always been a day-labourer whose presence in the narratives simply faded when the story shifted to the adult Jesus. What we know is that the family was real enough to have names, and that those names belong to a time and a place where a family's survival was never far from precarious.

The grapes that grew on the terraces would have been for wine and for eating and for the raisins that kept through the summer. The olives would have been pressed for oil that cooked the food and lit the lamps and anointed skin that the dust had dried out. The grain grew in the flatter places, the wheat and the barley, and it was ground by women's hands — the two stones, the lower one fixed, the upper one turned, the grain passing through between them in a process that took time and produced the fine

dust that settled somewhere in the house and somewhere on the person who tended the mill. The work of the household was slow work, repetitive work, work that left its mark on the body over years: the joints of the hands, the spine, the knees from kneeling at the mill or bending in the vineyard or standing all day at a building site carrying stone that was heavier than it looked because the quarries did not come with etiquettes.

A village of four hundred also has a particular kind of social density. If you did something notable, people knew. If you said something that changed the way people thought about a thing, they carried it to the next village and the next and the village beyond that, because the region was not cut off — it was a landscape of paths and tracks and the lake that served as a highway, and news moved through those channels in a way that is hard to measure but impossible to ignore. A teacher who attracted attention in Capernaum could be known in Nazareth by the same evening if someone walked fast enough and the message was worth carrying. A controversial figure could find the whole region talking about him before he reached the city that would eventually decide his fate. This is one of the ways the speed of the movement's spread makes sense: not through the machinery of institutions or the distribution of texts, but through the ordinary channels of a population that lived close enough to one another to carry a story from one end of the region to the other in days.

The landscape around Nazareth is the landscape of the Galilee in the first century: the low hills, the terraces, the patches of flat ground where a village could sit, the visibility of the country beyond to the west and the south. On a clear day you can see enough to know that you are not alone in the world, and you can see enough to know that the world beyond your village is larger than your village and that the people in it are living in the same material conditions you are, with the same taxes and the same labour and the same religious calendar, even if they are not the same people and do not share your family's particular troubles. The view is not panoramic in the modern sense; it is the view of a person who knows the ground he walks on and knows that it ends somewhere, and knows that the ending is not an ending but a beginning of another stretch of the same kind of ground.

This is the world Jesus was born into. A village so small it had no coins minted in its name. A family probably without land enough to live on. A trade that meant work with the hands on material that had to hold weight. A religious calendar that structured the year and took Sabbath and festival from the ordinary week. A social density in which what a person did and said would be carried beyond the village by people who had no reason to report it other than that it was worth carrying. A landscape of terraces and hills and the lake to the east, all of it real and particular and not a backdrop — it was the material condition of every day.

The first question the book asks is already sitting here, in the dust of that village: how does a nobody from a place this ordinary become the most consequential human being who ever lived? Not in the sense of doctrine, not in the sense of institution, not in the sense of the argument about whether it is true — those are not the question. The question is about the man: what he ate, who paid for his travel, what his accent gave away, what he was afraid of, why the authorities decided he was a problem, and what it cost the people who loved him. The answer will not be found in the village itself. Nazareth does not contain it. But the village is where the answer has to start, because it is the material condition from which the man emerged, and it is the scale of ordinary life against which everything that came later has to be measured.

A village of four hundred. A family of day-labourers. A trade that meant getting your hands dirty. A religious calendar that interrupted the week. A landscape that you could walk out of and into the wider country beyond. This is not where the story goes from here. This is where it starts — and it starts because a young man who was born into exactly this world walked out of it at some point and did not come back, and the reason he walked out is the reason the book is being written.

The King Who Built the Mountain

The man who ruled the world Jesus was born into was not the emperor in Rome. That man — Augustus, and after him Tiberius — lived in a city three hundred miles and a completely different world away, and his interest in the province of Judaea was the interest of a distant administrator in a thing he did not fully understand and did not much want to. The man who shaped the daily reality of the Galilee and the Judea and the Jerusalem that Jesus would walk into was Herod the Great, and Herod was not a Roman. He was an Idumean — a descendant of the people the Maccabees had conquered and forced to convert a century earlier — and whether the Jerusalem elite regarded that conversion as legitimate was a live and venomous question in his own time. He was a Jew in the political sense that mattered to Rome: he observed the Torah, he rebuilt the Temple, and he presented himself as the protector of Jewish institutions. Whether he was a Jew in the genealogical sense that the Jerusalem aristocracy cared about was the question his enemies asked and never settled. He was a client king, appointed by Rome, ruling a territory that Rome wanted quiet and revenue from and otherwise did not worry about very much. And he built.

Herod was not a modest builder. The kind of building he did was the kind that a man does when he wants to make a statement that the people living under him will feel in the stone of their lives before they hear it in any decree. He rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem so completely that when the work was done, the place was almost unrecognisable from what had stood there before. The Temple Mount was enlarged, the platform extended over arches and fill and the labour of thousands of workers drawn from the population of the province, and the Temple itself was made into one of the wonders of the ancient world — not in the sense of the seven canonical wonders, but in the sense that a person arriving in Jerusalem for the first time, a pilgrim from the diaspora or a Galilean peasant making his first ascent, would have trouble believing a man had built it. The historian Josephus, who is the only source we have for the full scale of it and who was himself a priest of the family that had run the Temple before Herod touched it, describes the gates, the courts, the white stone, the gold that caught the sun, the sanctuary so rich it seemed to burn. This was not a building project for local use. It was a statement made in the language of stone that Herod was the man who gave God a better house than anyone before him had managed, and that Rome, which had authorised it, could feel satisfied that Jerusalem was under control and Jerusalem's God was under Herod.

The cost of all of this was paid by the people who lived in the villages of the region, and the way it was paid is part of the reason that a man like Jesus — a *tektōn* from a family without land — would have known Herod's reign not as a historical period but as a material fact. Taxes went up to pay for the Temple and the palace at Jerusalem and the fortress at Masada and the harbour at Caesarea and the palace-fortress at Herodium and the city of Tiberias that Herod's son would found. Labour drafts pulled men into building work that was not their own, on sites they had not chosen, doing things they

would not have chosen to do. The building boom of the Herodian period was real and it was enormous, and it was also the background condition of every *tektōn*'s life in Galilee for the better part of a century. If your family's work was building things, and you were living in the time of Herod and his sons, then the demand for your hands was not a question. The question was where the work was, and how much of it there was, and whether it would keep you alive through the year.

The building went on across the region, and not all of it was in Jerusalem. Herod built a palace at Jerusalem that was itself a small city within the city, with gardens and pools and a theatre that the Jewish population of the city — a population that at least in principle did not attend theatres — would have found either thrilling or deeply objectionable depending on which part of the religious spectrum they belonged to. He built a new city at Caesarea Maritima on the coast, a harbour that required engineering on a scale the eastern Mediterranean had rarely seen, with a mole built out into the sea and a temple to the emperor Augustus on top of it, and a city named in honour of Caesar that was as Roman in its layout and its public buildings as anything in the province could be. He built at Jericho, in the Jordan valley, a palace that turned the winter climate into a pleasure and a display of his power over the landscape itself. He built at Masada, on the desert plateau that overlooks the Dead Sea, a fortress that was at once a refuge in case things went wrong — which they eventually did — and a monument to the idea that Herod could hold any ground he chose to hold. He built at Herodium, a hill southeast of Jerusalem that he had artificially shaped into a cone and crowned with a palace, so that the view from the top would show the man who had built it and also show that he could make a mountain into something that looked like a mountain and was actually something he had done to it himself. He built in Samaria, which he renamed Sebaste in honour of Augustus, and he built in the centre of the country a Greek-style city called Antipatris, named for his father Antipater.

The point of listing all of this is not that every building matters equally to the story of Jesus. Most of them do not. The point is that the physical world Jesus was born into was a world that had been worked over, reshaped, taxed to pay for, and watched being reshaped by a man whose name was on the monuments and whose agents were at work everywhere, and that this was true in a way that a peasant family in Nazareth would have felt even if they never went to see any of it. The stone that the *tektōn* worked may have come from a quarry that Herod's projects had opened. The demand that kept the family employed may have come from the building activity of Herod or his sons. The taxes that left the family short in a bad year may have gone partly toward a palace in Jericho or a harbour on the coast. The whole region was being remade around them, and the remaking was paid for in the small economies of village life.

Herod died in 4 BCE, in Jericho, after an illness that his court physicians could not resolve and that the accounts describe with the kind of detail that suggests a man in physical decline for some time. The death of Herod was not a quiet moment. It was the occasion for a wave of unrest across the region — rebellions broke out in several places, among them the city of Sepphoris, which is only four miles from Nazareth, where a revolt led by one Judas son of Ezekias — a bandit chief Herod had executed years earlier — seized the armoury and held the city until the Roman governor of Syria, Varus, sent a force to suppress it. Sepphoris was burned in the suppression, and the Romans crucified roughly two thousand of the participants. The numbers are the kind of numbers that are hard to trust absolutely — Josephus reports them, and Josephus is the only source, and his numbers are often the kind of numbers that make a point rather than report a count — but the event itself is

not in doubt: Sepphoris, so near to Nazareth that a man walking from one to the other would have felt the distance as something between a long walk and a short journey, was the site of a serious revolt in the year of Herod's death, and it was suppressed by Roman force, and its population lived through the consequences of that.

This is the moment at which the world that Jesus was born into changed. Herod had been a tyrant but he had been a tyrant who kept the peace, and the peace was what Rome cared about. His death introduced a brief period of chaos — the kingdom was divided among his sons, the Romans did not immediately settle on the arrangement they would keep, and there were revolts in more than one place, and crucifixions for the first time on a scale that announced what the Roman response would be when a province's population decided to make a problem of itself. Jesus was born, by the usual reckoning, somewhere near the beginning or the middle of this period — the chronology of his birth is itself uncertain, and the familiar date of 4 BCE attached to Herod's death is as good a marker as any of the period in which he was born, but the exactness of it is not something we can claim. What we can say is that Jesus grew up in a region that had just lived through a revolt in a town close to his own, a revolt that ended in crucifixion, and that the memory of that event would have been present in the region for the whole of his life, whether anyone named it to him or not.

Herod's building programme did not stop with his death. The Temple was still being built — the work on the sanctuary itself was completed, but the outbuildings and the courts continued for decades, and the work went on under the supervision of the priests and the Herodian rulers who succeeded him, and it was still not entirely finished when Jesus was in Jerusalem. The building continued under Herod Antipas in Galilee, who was the ruler of the region that included Nazareth throughout Jesus' life, and who built the city of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, naming it for the emperor of the moment and making it into a capital that was as Herodian in its ambition as anything his father had done. The building continued in a way that would have mattered to a *tektōn*: new cities to build, new palaces to construct, ongoing work on the Temple and its surroundings. The demand for hands did not dry up when Herod died. If anything, the division of the kingdom among several rulers created more building projects competing for the same labour.

This is one of the things that makes the background of the Gospels' story legible in material terms. When the Gospels speak of Jesus as a *tektōn*, as a craftsman or a builder, they are attaching him to a trade that existed in a very specific historical context — the context of Herodian building, of Roman-suppressed revolt, of tax and labour and the demand that came from the reshaping of the region. A man who worked with his hands in Galilee at the beginning of the first century was not working in a vacuum. He was working in a region that had been remade by a king and was still being remade by his sons, and the work was there because the building was there. The economic life of Nazareth — a village too small to have its own coins, too small to have its own synagogue we can find, too small to be anyone's destination — was tied to the building economy of the larger towns, and that economy was a Herodian economy in its origin and for a long time afterward.

The thing to hold onto as the book moves forward is not the list of palaces and fortresses and cities. It is the material fact that the man who would walk through Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem was born into a world that Herod had made physically and economically, and that the death of Herod had introduced into the region a new and visible form of Roman power — crucifixion, used on a large scale for the first time in living memory, and used on a town that was close enough to Nazareth that it

was not a distant event but a local one. Herod's building is the background of the landscape, and Herod's death and the revolt that followed it are the background of the political landscape. Both of them run through the rest of the book, and they run through it most acutely in the chapters that come later, when the man who was born into this world steps into the city that Herod had rebuilt and into the politics that Herod's death had made visible.

For the moment, the point is simple: the village of four hundred was not, in the larger sense, a village of four hundred. It was a village of four hundred inside a region that had been reshaped by a king's building, taxed for a king's purposes, and then shaken by a revolt that the Romans had answered with the kind of force that marked a man for death in public in a way that everyone in the region understood. The world was not quiet. It was not small. It was not simple. It was the specific world of a province under a client king, under Rome, under the building and the taxes and the revolt and the crucifixion, and Jesus was born into it as a child who would grow up knowing the work of his hands and the shape of the country around him and, eventually, the thing that the kingdom was asking for.

Rome's Arrangement

The empire did not run the province of Judaea the way a modern state runs a province. The modern state wants the tax and the law and the uniform administration and the record of it that survives in a bureaucracy. Rome wanted the tax and the peace and the absence of anyone making a problem of themselves, and it was prepared to accept a great deal of local variation in how those things were achieved as long as the result held. The arrangement that produced the world Jesus was born into was therefore not a single system but a patchwork of mechanisms, some of them very old, some of them improvised, all of them designed to make the province produce without producing revolt, and all of them visible in the background of what happened to Jesus in the end.

The most immediate fact of Roman rule in a province like Judaea was that the emperor did not live there and did not want to. The emperor in Rome wanted the eastern frontier quiet, and the province was quiet in the specific sense that meant it did not rebel at a scale Rome could not manage. The arrangement that achieved this was a governor — a prefect or a procurator, the title changing over time for reasons that had more to do with the internal politics of the empire than with any change in the substance of what the governor did — who was sent from the centre for a term of office and who was responsible for the army detachment that Rome kept in the province and for the collection of the taxes that kept the centre satisfied and for the suppression of any rebellion that required Roman military force to end. Pilate, who governed Judaea from 26 to 36 CE, during the part of Jesus' life when the public ministry was happening, was one of these governors. He was a Roman of the equestrian order, which is to say he was not from the senatorial class — he was from the class below the senators, the class that filled the senior administrative and military posts — and his tenure in Judaea was long enough by the standards of the job to suggest that he was at least not incompetent in the eyes of the centre, and controversial enough in the province that the sources who later wrote about him had more than one story to tell.

The governor's job was not, in the first instance, to administer justice in the way a modern judge or administrator would understand it. It was to keep the peace and to ensure the revenue came in and to be the Roman presence in the province. The army that was available to him was not a large one.

Judaea was not a major military theatre; it was a back province of the empire, and the force stationed there was small by the standards of the legions that guarded the Rhine or the Euphrates. The prefect's cohort or cohorts — the unit or units that Pilate would have had available — were enough to police the province and to respond to a revolt when one broke out and to impose the Roman will when the local population made it necessary, but they were not enough to occupy the country in the sense of a standing occupation that sat on every corner. The Roman presence was concentrated in a few places: the governor's seat, which for most of the period was at Caesarea on the coast rather than in Jerusalem, and the places where the army happened to be when it was needed. When the governor visited Jerusalem, which he did at the festivals — the pilgrim crowds swelled the city, and a governor who wanted to keep the peace at Passover did not do it from the coast — he brought soldiers with him, and the soldiers were visible. The porticoes of the Temple, the spaces around the city, the entry points — these were the places where the Roman presence announced itself during the festivals, and the visibility of that presence was one of the deliberate things about the arrangement. Rome did not want the population to forget that it was there.

The tax system was the other great mechanism of Roman control, and it is worth understanding in some detail because it is one of the things that shaped the material life of everyone in the province and because it is the mechanism that most directly connected the village in Galilee to the emperor in Rome. The taxes were of more than one kind. There was the tribute that the province owed to Rome — a fixed amount that the governor was responsible for collecting and passing on. There was the Temple tax, the half-shekel that every Jewish adult male was expected to pay, which was collected locally and sent to Jerusalem and which functioned as both a religious obligation and, in practice, a significant source of revenue for the Temple authorities. There were the various local levies and the customs duties on the roads and at the ports, the taxes on goods moving through the province, the taxes on the harvest, the taxes assessed on property and on people. The system was not a single machine; it was a set of overlapping claims on the population, and the population was poor enough and the repeated demands were relentless enough that the experience of tax was one of constant pressure rather than a single annual event. A farmer or a day-labourer in Galilee was not thinking about Rome in the abstract; he was thinking about the tax collector, and the tax collector was the face of Rome in his daily life.

Tax collection in the Roman provinces was often farmed out to *publicani* — tax-farmers — who contracted with the state to collect a fixed amount and kept whatever they could extract above that. This is the mechanism that got a certain kind of bad reputation in the ancient sources and in the Gospels, where the tax-collectors appear as a distinctive social type, a person who has bought the right to collect from his own neighbours and whose interest is in collecting as much as possible. The *publicani* were not, in fact, always the villains of the piece in the way the reputation suggests; they were doing a job that the state had assigned to them, and the job was to extract revenue, and extracting revenue from a poor population was a job that tended to produce unpopular people. But the reputation is real in the sense that the experience of being taxed by someone who had purchased the right to tax you was a genuine source of grievance, and the Gospels' attention to tax-collectors as a category — the call of the tax-collector to discipleship, the complaint that Jesus ate with them, the presence of tax-collectors in the story as figures who are both hated and, in the narrative, saved — makes sense as a reflection of the fact that this was the actual face of Roman fiscal power for many people in the province.

The client-king arrangement was the third mechanism, and it is the one that Herod and his sons represent. Rome did not govern everything directly. In many places it governed through local rulers who were clients — kings or tetrarchs who were dependent on Rome for their position and who were responsible for the stability of their own territory and for delivering the revenue Rome expected from it. Herod the Great was the most prominent example in the Jewish region, but the arrangement continued under his sons, who divided his kingdom among themselves. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea — the territories that included Nazareth — throughout Jesus' life. Herod Philip ruled the territories to the north and east. Archelaus ruled Judea and Samaria until Rome removed him and took direct control of his territory, which is why Pilate was governing Judea at the time of Jesus' ministry. The division of Herod's kingdom and the Roman decision to take direct control of Judea while leaving Galilee under Antipas produced the political geography of the Gospels' story: Jesus lived and worked under Antipas in Galilee, and he died under Pilate in Judea, and the difference between the two rulers — one a tetrarch with his own building programme and his own court, the other a Roman prefect with a small army and the emperor's authority behind him — is one of the structural facts of the story.

The collaboration between the Roman governor and the local authorities — the Temple hierarchy, the high priest, the council — was the fourth mechanism, and it is the one that matters most for the end of the story. Rome did not want to govern the religious and social life of the province directly; it wanted the local authorities to do that and to keep the peace and to deliver the revenue. The high priest and the Sanhedrin — or the council that in some form existed in Jerusalem at the time — were, whatever their exact nature and authority, the local institution that Rome worked with, and the relationship between Pilate and the high priest of the moment (Caiaphas, according to the Gospel tradition, who held the office for a long period, from 18 to 36 CE, which is to say the same period as Pilate's governorship, which is not a coincidence that suggests an arrangement that held for the whole time) was the relationship on which the suppression of local trouble depended. The high priest wanted the Temple protected and the Roman presence managed and the religious obligations of the population respected. Pilate wanted the same things, in different terms: the Temple was part of what made the province stable, and the religious sensitivities of the population were a source of trouble he did not want to provoke unnecessarily, and the revenue and the peace were what he was in the province to secure. The collaboration between them was real and it was practical and it was the arrangement that produced the decision — or the series of decisions — that ended in crucifixion.

The crucifixion itself needs a word here, at the beginning, because it is the instrument of Roman policy that re-appears throughout the book and because it is the thing that most directly connects the Roman arrangement to what happened to Jesus. Crucifixion was not a Jewish form of execution. It was a Roman form, used for a specific purpose: to punish and deter people who had rebelled against Roman authority or who had become a political problem in a way that required public display of the consequences. It was not used for a dispute between Jews and Jews, or for a religious offence, or for a mere theft or a mere assault. It was used for bandits and rebels and slaves and anyone who made a problem of themselves against the order that Rome maintained. The method itself was designed to be public and extended and humiliating — not a quick death but a death that took time and was displayed and was intended to do more than end a life. It was used on the two men crucified alongside Jesus, on the rebels in Sepphoris after Herod's death, on anyone Rome wanted to make an example of. The presence of crucifixion in the story of Jesus is not, in other words, the accident of a

particular trial that went wrong. It is the instrument that Rome used on people who became problems, and the decision to use it was a Roman decision — Pilate's decision, or the Roman authority's decision — and it was the decision that the authorities in Jerusalem could not make themselves.

The crucifixion of Jesus in the end was a Roman execution, carried out by Roman authority, using a Roman method, for a reason that was ultimately Roman: the decision that this man had become a political problem. The Gospels frame the trial in terms that put the Jewish authorities in the foreground and Pilate in the background, and they do so for reasons that make sense in the context of the people who wrote them and the communities they wrote for. But the historical reality is that the Jewish authorities could not crucify anyone, and that the decision to crucify was the Roman decision, and that Pilate was the Roman authority in the province at the time. The archaeology and the inscriptions and the other evidence we have about Pilate — the Pilate Stone found at Caesarea, which names him as the prefect of Judaea, the references in Philo and Josephus that describe him as inflexible, angry, and infuriating to the Jewish population — do not give us the full picture of what he was like or what he decided about Jesus in the specific moment. But they do give us the context: a governor who had the power to crucify, who used it on others, who was not popular with the Jewish population, and who was in the province at the time that Jesus was brought to him. The Roman arrangement was the machinery that ran underneath the whole story, and crucifixion was the instrument it used when the machinery decided someone had to be removed.

This is the arrangement in broad outline: a province governed by a governor who wanted peace and revenue and used a small army to secure them; a tax system that extracted from the population and produced in the population the experience of being taxed by publicani and tax-collectors; a client-king arrangement that had shaped the region under Herod and continued under his sons; a collaboration between the Roman governor and the local religious authorities that kept the province stable; and the instrument of crucifixion that Rome used on people who became problems. The arrangement is not the story of Jesus. The arrangement is the background of the story — the machinery that was running in the background when Jesus was born in Nazareth, when he walked through Galilee, when he went up to Jerusalem, when he was brought to Pilate and crucified. The machinery did not make him. The machinery made the conditions in which his life happened, and it made the conditions in which his death happened, and it made the conditions in which the story of his life and death was recorded and transmitted and eventually read.

The next chapter moves into the world that this machinery was built around and within: the world of Jewish belief and practice in Galilee, the world of Temple and Torah and Sabbath and the hope for God's kingdom that structured the life of the people who lived in the villages of the region, including the village of four hundred where Jesus was raised. The machinery of Rome is the outer frame. The life inside the frame is what the next chapter is about.

What a Jew Believed in Galilee

The day starts before it looks like a day. In a Galilean village in the first century, the hour is still dark when the woman at the mortar begins the work of turning grain into something the family can eat, and the man who slept on the floor because there was no bed that belonged to him wakes to the sound of it and knows, before he has opened his eyes, what day it is. It is Sabbath. The week has

arrived at its appointed end, and the day that follows is not, in the way that matters, a continuation of the week. It is the day that interrupts the week and says that the week belongs to God as much as it belongs to the work that keeps a body alive.

This is not a rule handed down at a distance and obeyed because a person has been told to obey. It is a rhythm that has shaped the life of the village from the time anyone in it can remember, and the rhythm is one that every family feels in the body. The work that would have happened on any other day — the field that would have been checked, the stone that would have been lifted, the olive that would have been picked — does not happen. The food for the day was prepared before the Sabbath began, because cooking on the Sabbath is one of the things the Sabbath says no to. The fire is already lit, or left hot enough from the evening before, and the meal is made from what was ready. A person who lives inside this rhythm does not wake on a Sabbath and ask what to do. The day has a shape before the person wakes into it, and the shape is rest that is also an obligation: a day given to God that is also a day given to the family, to the walk to the neighbour's house, to the conversation that does not rush because there is no work waiting.

The village has no synagogue we can find. That fact, which mattered enough to mention when the book opened in Nazareth, matters here too, but for a different reason. It does not mean the people of the village had no religious life. It means their religious life was carried in the week and in the festivals and in the home and in the talk that happened at the well and at the meal-table and on the paths between the terraces, rather than in a building with a name over the door. The life of Torah was real in the village. The Torah was the inherited instruction of the people — the law and the story and the commandments that structured what a Jew did and did not do, what a Jew owed to God and to the neighbour whose ox had fallen into a pit. It was not a single book held in a library. It was a living tradition that lived in the arguments people had about what it meant and in the daily decisions people made about what to eat and whom to touch and when to rest and when to work, carried in the memory of the community the way a song is carried in the memory of the people who sing it together.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish world in a way no building in Galilee could be, and the village had no direct access to it, but the Temple was nevertheless present in the life of the village in more ways than one. The half-shekel Temple tax was paid once a year by every Jewish adult male, and the coin made its way from the village to Jerusalem and into the economy of the Temple and the people who ran it. The pilgrimage festivals — Passover above all, but also the harvest festivals — drew people up to Jerusalem in numbers that changed the city and changed the province, and a Galilean family that could afford the journey went up at Passover and came back with stories and sometimes with trouble, and a family that could not afford the journey still felt the pull of the feast and the news that travelled back. The Temple was in Jerusalem and the village was in Galilee and the distance between them was several days' walk at least, but the Temple was not a distant thing in the sense of being irrelevant. It was a distant thing in the sense of being the centre of a world that the village belonged to without being at the centre of.

This is the shared world — the world that almost every Jew in the region moved inside, whatever their differences on the details. The Temple was the place where God's presence dwelt in a particular and concentrated way. The Torah was the instruction that structured the life of the people. The Sabbath was the weekly interruption that said the world was not only the world of work and that the

people belonged to God as well as to their labour. The festivals were the moments when the whole people, insofar as they could be the whole people, gathered and remembered and celebrated and — at Passover above all — remembered an escape from Egypt and told the story of it as if it had happened to them, because the telling was a way of making it present. These were not beliefs in the sense of propositions someone assented to and then moved on. They were the fabric of life, the things that shaped what a person did on a given day and what a person expected from the year and what a person feared and hoped for.

Within that shared world there were differences — real ones, genuine disagreement about what the Torah meant and how it should be kept and what the religious life of the people was actually for. The differences were carried by people who had names for themselves and names for one another, and the names are the ones the reader has probably already heard, though maybe not with the understanding that they were real groups of real people and not just furniture in the Gospel stories.

The Pharisees were one of these groups. By the account of the historian Josephus, who wrote about them later, they had become significant in the time of the Hasmonean rulers and held to a particular way of reading and keeping the Torah — a way that gave weight to the oral traditions that had grown up around the written law and that paid attention to the details of purity and the obligations of daily life in a way that the other groups did not. The Pharisees are the group that appears most often in the Gospels as a disputant, and the pattern of the disputes — over Sabbath, over eating, over the details of Torah observance — tells us what they were actually concerned with, which was exactly those things. The Gospels present them as the people who cared about the same things Jesus cared about — the law of God, the purity of the people, the relationship between Israel and God — and who disagreed with him about what that meant in practice. The Pharisees were a piety movement within Judaism, not an antagonist faction, and the arguments with Jesus were intra-Jewish arguments between people who cared about the same things. Reading them as hypocrites is a habit the tradition baked in for its own reasons, and the book will have to undo it later, but it begins here, with the reader understanding who they actually were.

The Sadducees were another group, and they were different enough from the Pharisees that the difference was genuine. The Sadducees were associated with the Temple hierarchy and the priestly families and the wealthy and the politically connected, and they appear to have been less interested in the oral traditions than the Pharisees were and more interested in the written Torah taken by itself. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, which is one of the few things we can say with reasonable confidence about the difference between the groups, because it is reported by Josephus and by the New Testament and it is a difference that would have mattered enormously to people who thought about what happened after death. The Sadducees held power in Jerusalem, and the power was connected to the Temple, and the Temple was the institution that Rome was willing to work with because it was an institution that wanted to keep the peace and deliver the revenue and not provoke trouble. The collaboration between the Temple hierarchy and Rome is one of the structural facts of the story, and it begins here, in the landscape of Jerusalem politics, before it becomes a problem in the story of Jesus.

The Essenes were a third group, less present in the Gospels and more present in Josephus and in the documents found at Qumran — the Dead Sea Scrolls — which give us a window into one community's version of the Jewish world at this time. They were a community that had withdrawn

from the main Temple in Jerusalem because they believed it had been corrupted, and formed their own community with its own rules of purity and its own reading of the Torah and its own expectation that God would soon act against the forces of darkness and establish the kingdom. They are useful for the book because they show one end of the spectrum of what Jewish belief could look like — polarised, communal, apocalyptic — and because they remind the reader that the kingdom hope was not a single thing and that different people who used the same language meant different things by it. How far the Essenes extended into Galilee is not something we can say with confidence. They should be understood as present in the landscape of Jewish belief at this time, not as a major presence in the Galilean villages.

What tied these groups together, underneath the differences, was the shared world described above: the Temple, the Torah, the Sabbath, the festivals, the hope that God was acting in the history of the people and would act again. A Pharisee and a Sadducee and an Essene might have disagreed about resurrection and about the oral traditions and about the purity of the Temple, but they would all have agreed that the Torah mattered and that the Sabbath mattered and that God had made a claim on the people of Israel and that the claim was still in force.

The hope that ran through all of this — the hope that is the emotional core of the chapter, the thing that makes the world of Jewish belief matter to a person whose life is shaped by debt and labour and the sense that the world is not as it should be — is the hope for the kingdom of God. This is one of the phrases that Jesus uses most often and that the Gospels attribute most densely to him, and it is a phrase that the reader has probably encountered in some form, but the form the reader has encountered may not be the form it had in the mouth of a first-century Galilean Jew.

The kingdom of God, in its first-century meaning, is the rule of God. It is not primarily a place you go when you die, and it is not primarily a state of soul or a condition of the afterlife. It is the moment when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, and the hope is that this moment is coming — that the world as it is, with its oppressors and its poverty and its injustice and its taxes and its crucifixions and its people who die without land and without security, is not the final state of the world, and that God will intervene in history in a way that sets things right.

To a farmer in debt, this hope was not abstract. It was about the debt. It was about the land that someone else's ancestors had taken and that the farmer's family had worked for generations without owning. It was about the tax collector who took from the farmer in a way that left the farmer with enough to survive the next year and not enough to thrive in it. It was about the year when the drought came and the goats died and the children went hungry, and the sense that this was not how the world was meant to be and that the God of Israel, the God who had brought the people out of Egypt and given them the land and the law, would someday make it otherwise. The kingdom hope was the hope that the world would be set right — the poor lifted up, the oppressor brought down, the people restored to what they were meant to be.

This hope took different forms in different people's mouths. Some heard it as apocalyptic: the end is coming, the world as we know it will be destroyed and replaced, and God's kingdom will arrive in a moment of decisive action. Some heard it as present-tense: the kingdom is breaking into the world now, in the ministry of a teacher and a healer, a person who announces that the rule of God is near, and the invitation is to live inside that now. The Gospels are full of both strands, and the reason they are full of both strands is that the hope itself was not a single, tidy thing. The language of the

kingdom was language that a first-century Jew would have understood as a claim about God acting in history and about the world being set right, and the different versions of the claim were versions of the same hope, argued over and varied in and made specific to particular communities.

The kingdom hope is what connects the rest of this chapter — the Temple, the Torah, the Sabbath, the factions — to the person of Jesus. He moves inside this world. He argues within it. He uses the language of it. When he announces the kingdom of God, he is not announcing something foreign to the Jewish world of the first century; he is making a claim inside that world, using language his audience would have understood, about a hope they would have carried in them whether they were Pharisees or Sadducees or Essenes or simply Jews who went to the synagogue when they could, paid the Temple tax, kept the Sabbath, and hoped that God would act.

The disputes he has with the Pharisees — the disputes that will run through the later chapters of the book — are disputes about the right keeping of the Torah in this shared world, and the disputes are real and the disagreement is real, but the two sides are not opponents from different planets. They are people who care about the same things — the law of God, the purity of the people, the relationship between Israel and God — and who disagree about what that means in practice. The Pharisees are not the villains of a morality play. They are a Jewish movement concerned with the same things Jesus is concerned with, and the argument between them is an argument inside a shared world.

The machinery of Rome is running in the background — the governor and the tax and the crucifixion that was used on Sepphoris and the soldiers on the porticoes of the Temple. The Herodian building programme has left its mark on the landscape. The village of four hundred is waiting for the young man who will walk out of it. And inside all of that, there is a world of Jewish belief and practice, rich and contested and real, in which Jesus was born and grew up and learned to argue and eventually began to speak. The machinery of Rome is the outer frame, as the last chapter said. The life inside the frame — the life of Torah and Temple and Sabbath and the hope for the kingdom — is the world the reader now has enough of to understand what Jesus was doing when he started doing it.

The Family Trade

Picture it this way, though no one wrote it down: the day started before the sun was up, the way the days started for men who worked with their hands and had no choice about when the work found them. In a village on a ridge north of the Lake of Galilee, the *tektōn* woke before the light was useful and made ready in the dark. The image of Jesus with a workbench and a set of tools arranged beside it belongs to later centuries and to Christian art that wanted him to look like a craftsman with a practice, not a labourer who took work where he could get it. What he had was his hands and the work his hands could do and, when the work ran out, the walk to where it might be found.

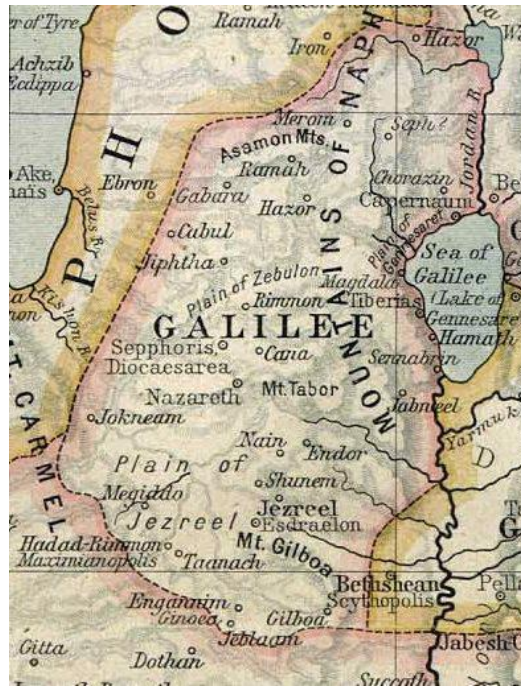
The word that Mark uses for him — the only place the Gospels explicitly name his trade — is *tektōn*. The Gospels were written in Greek, and the word in Greek is not, in the narrow sense, "carpenter." It means a maker, a builder, someone who works material into something that holds together. The range of the word is wide enough to include the man who framed a wall of stone and the man who notched timber and the man who repaired a roof that had started to leak and the man who shaped a door that would not sag. It leans in the direction of wood — the material of furniture and doorframes and

yokes and plough-handles — but the word does not itself choose between wood and stone, and a listener in the first century would not have pictured a specialist woodworker. Stone was the material of walls and foundations; the *tektōn* worked whichever material the job required. If you told a listener in the first century that Jesus was a *tektōn*, the listener did not picture a man with a workshop. The listener pictured a man who made things with his hands, and who made them for wages.

That the word survives at all in the Gospel tradition is worth a moment of attention. Mark says Jesus is "the carpenter" — or, in Greek, "the *tektōn*" — and adds that he is the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and that he has sisters in the village. Matthew preserves the same scene but shifts the wording in a small and telling way: in Matthew, Jesus is "the carpenter's son," and Joseph is the carpenter. The difference is this: Mark identifies Jesus by the trade; Matthew identifies Jesus by his father's trade. Both attest the same thing, which is that the family was known for work of the building kind, and that the work was attached to the man's own name as much as to his father's. The tradition is not free of ambiguity — we cannot say whether Jesus learned the trade from Joseph, or whether Joseph was dead by the time Jesus took it up himself, or whether the trade was shared across the family in a way that made the label stick regardless of who was doing the work. What we can say is that the family of Joseph and Mary and their named children was a *tektōn* family, and that this mattered to the people who knew them.

The family was large enough to be an economic fact. Mark names at least four brothers — James, Joses, Judas, and Simon — and mentions sisters without saying how many. A household of this size, in the economy of a Galilean village, was not a small family. It was a family with mouths that multiplied faster than its wages did, with children who grew into workers who needed to be put to work, with a mother who managed what could be managed and a father whose absence from the adult Jesus story — the Gospels mention Joseph in the infancy narratives and then not again — either means he had died sometime in Jesus' youth or means something about the Gospel writers' interest that it is hard to untangle. The silence about Joseph after childhood is not a fact about his death; it is a fact about what the Gospels chose to record. But the reasonable reading of the silence, for a family of this size, is that the household lost its main earner at some point and that the sons picked up the work, and that by the time the adult Jesus is visible in the story the family is being carried by the work of the sons and the economy of the village and the occasional help of neighbours who had enough to share and not enough to spare.

The work was not in the village. Nazareth was small — the book opened on that, a village of four hundred, a place without a synagogue we can find and without the kind of road traffic that made a town into a site of wages — and the wages available inside the village were the wages of subsistence: the terraces that produced what they produced, the olive groves, the vines, the small grain fields, the daily work that neighbours traded with neighbours and that was never quite enough. The work that paid — the work that put a *tektōn* in a position to support six children and a mother and himself — was the work that was happening four miles to the north, in the city that Herod Antipas was building.



Nazareth, Sepphoris, and Tiberias on the lake — the triangle of village and building-boom cities that gave a Galilean builder his work. (Map: William R. Shepherd, *The Historical Atlas*, 1923; public domain.)

Sepphoris was rebuilt after the revolt that burned it in the year Herod the Great died. That was the year 4 BCE, when, after Herod's death, a man from Galilee named Judas rallied the city to revolt in the power vacuum that followed; the Roman legate Varus, in the region to impose order on the succession, sent a legion to suppress it. Sepphoris was taken, burned, and laid flat. The revolt itself was one of several that broke out across the territory in the power vacuum after Herod's death; the suppression of it is the background for what came next. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great and the tetrarch who ruled Galilee for the rest of the century, made Sepphoris his capital and rebuilt it as a city on the Roman model: a colonnaded street, a theatre, public buildings, a garrison, walls. The work started soon after he took power and ran for years — a colonnaded street that required masons and labourers, a theatre that required skilled builders and stone-cutters, walls that required the same, a city that took a workforce and kept it busy. It was four miles from Nazareth. A *tektōn* could walk there in the morning and back in the evening, and some of the men from the village no doubt did.

When Antipas later built Tiberias, on the western shore of the lake, the work moved closer to the lake and farther from Nazareth. Tiberias was founded in the years around 20 CE, named after the emperor, built on ground that had been a burial ground and so stirred opposition from residents who held the soil unclean — Josephus notes the point — and laid out as a planned city with a stadium and a basilica and a palace. The distances from Nazareth to Tiberias were greater, a two-day walk round trip by the routes of the period, and so less likely to be the daily site of work for a *tektōn* from the village. But the building of Tiberias and the ongoing work of the city — its maintenance, its expansion, the construction around it — added to the zone of demand for builders in Galilee as a whole. Between the rebuilding of Sepphoris and the founding of Tiberias, and the ongoing projects of Herod and his successors elsewhere in the region, there was work for builders for as long as a man who could do the work could find it and walk to it.

This is the economic context the reader needs and that the sources allow: a *tektōn* from Nazareth walking four miles to Sepphoris in the morning, carrying his tools or having them carried by a boy from the family, working on the city that Herod Antipas was building, coming home at evening when the work was done and the wages were paid, and doing it again the next day if the work was there. The wages were not recorded in any surviving document — no wage tables survive from first-century Galilee — and the chapter cannot say how much a *tektōn* was paid in a given year. It can say that the work existed, that it was close enough to be real, and that the work was the difference between a family that lived and a family that did not.

The family that Jesus belonged to, in this reconstruction, was a family that worked for wages and lived inside the margin of those wages. The men of the family — Joseph, if he lived into Jesus' adulthood, and Jesus and his brothers when they were old enough — worked the building trade if the work was in Sepphoris or in the larger building sites of the region, as the distance from Nazareth made plausible; the sources attest the building boom and the proximity, not the family's presence on any particular site. The household managed its food, its cloth, its children; the sisters that Mark mentions are not named and not counted. The household was not destitute in the sense of that word carrying its modern weight, but it was not secure in any way that would have made a season of bad work or a year of drought survivable without difficulty. A family of this size, if it held no land of its own — and the tradition gives us no sign that it did — was a family living hand to mouth on wages that depended on a building boom that depended on the decisions of a tetrarch and the peace of the empire.

Joseph's absence from the adult Jesus story has already been mentioned, and it is worth returning to it here, because it bears directly on the economics of the family. The Gospels say almost nothing about Joseph after the infancy narratives. He is present in Matthew's and Luke's accounts of Jesus' birth and childhood — the carpenter's son, the man who takes the child and his mother and flees to Egypt in one account, the man who receives the angel's word in the other — and then he is gone. In Mark's Gospel, he is not named at all in the adult Jesus story, and the family appears without reference to a living father. The reasonable inference — not a fact, an inference — is that Joseph died sometime before Jesus began his public work and left the household to be carried by the sons, and that by the time the adult Jesus is visible in the story the family is being carried by the work of the sons. The inference is reasonable; it is not in the text. The chapter should say that the text does not tell us what happened to Joseph and that the reasonable reading of the silence is that he was gone. (James' later role in the Jerusalem community — a figure the reader will meet in chapter 29 — is consistent with this reading but belongs to a later chapter's sources.)

The work shaped the man. A man who grew up in a *tektōn* family and worked the building trade in his youth had the body of a builder: the hands, the back, the walking, the carrying of stone and timber and tools, the soreness that came from work that was physical in a way that seated work was not. He knew the distances between Nazareth and Sepphoris by walking them. He knew the roads that ran between the ridge and the lake and the valley behind the ridge. He knew the kind of work that had to be done well and the kind of work that could be done poorly and still hold. He knew the wages and the walk and the morning start and the evening stop. When he later left the village and began to travel, he was not a man who had to learn to walk roads — he had walked them for years. When he later had no home and depended on others for shelter, he was not a man accustomed to comfort in a

roof — he had grown up in a house that was not luxurious and that had to be made to serve a large family on wages that were not secure. The body of a *tektōn* became the body of a teacher and a healer, and the material life of the former shaped the movements of the latter in ways that are hard to measure but easy to recognise when the sources describe a man who walked, who ate what was given, who had no place to lay his head, who moved from village to village without a base that belonged to him.

The specific work Jesus did — the things he built, the things he fixed, the things he made — is not recoverable from the sources. We cannot say whether he worked stone or timber more, whether he framed walls or shaped yokes or repaired roofs, whether he was the skilled end of the trade or the general end. The Markan word allows all of these; it commits to none. The chapter should not assert that Jesus was a "carpenter" in the narrow sense of a woodworker with a specialist practice, because the word does not carry that meaning with the necessary precision. It should use the word *tektōn* and give the reader the range: a builder, a maker, a man who worked material with his hands for wages. If it places the reader in a scene — a man at work on a wall or a roof or a door-frame in Sepphoris in the morning — the scene should be flagged as constructed, not reported.

The brothers named in Mark 6 — James, Joses, Judas, Simon — and the unnamed sisters are themselves the evidence of a family that was large enough to matter. The reader does not yet know what James will become; the reader only knows that he is one of the children in a *tektōn* household, one of several, and that his family's economics were the same as the family's. (James' later role in the Jerusalem community is a chapter-29 question, not a chapter-5 source.)

The household economy of a large *tektōn* family in a Galilean village in the first century was an economy of wages and margin and walking and work and the constant calculation of what the work would bring in and what the family needed and how the difference would be managed. It was an economy that Herod Antipas' building boom had put within reach and that Herod's death and the Roman tax system and the possibility of bad years kept from being secure. It was an economy that left a man with the body of a builder and the knowledge of roads and the experience of work before he ever began to speak about the kingdom of God.

What connects this chapter to the next is the family and the trade, and what connects this chapter to the book as a whole is the body of the man who carried the trade into the years when the text goes silent. The chapter that follows — chapter 6 — will turn to those thirty years, the years that the Gospels pass over and that the book must handle honestly rather than fill with invented scene. Before the silence, there is the work, and during the work there is a man with a body shaped by building, a family shaped by wages, and a village four miles from a city that was being built. The silence starts after the work. Before it, there is the man as he was when the work still defined him.

Part Two: The Hidden Years and the Baptizer

Everything We Don't Know

The thirty years that follow the childhood we cannot reconstruct are the largest silence in the story of Jesus. They are not a single year, or a handful of years, or an agreed-upon gap with details we have lost. They are an entire adult life, roughly from birth to about thirty, for which the sources contain almost nothing and the things they do contain do not agree. This chapter does not fill the silence. It explains why the silence is there, what the sources actually say, and what the reader should make of the stories that were written about the years the sources cannot recover.

The first thing to say is the number. Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was "about thirty years old" when he began his public work. The word "about" is doing real work. It is an estimate, not a birth certificate, and it is the only number the Gospels give us for the length of the quiet period. Everything else is inference: the fact that the adult Jesus appears at the Jordan, the fact that he had brothers and sisters old enough to be named in Mark, the fact that he was known as a *tektōn* from Nazareth. The shape of the known life is this: a man of about thirty, from a village on a ridge north of the lake, known by his trade, with a family large enough to matter, beginning a public ministry that would end in crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. The thirty years before that are almost entirely beyond us.

The second thing is the order of the sources, because it matters for what we can expect them to tell us. Paul's letters are the earliest Christian writing we have, and they date to the 50s CE — roughly twenty years after the crucifixion. Paul knew Jesus' brother James (he says so, in Galatians 1:19) and he knew Peter. He did not, in his surviving letters, tell the story of Jesus' life. Paul is interested in the death, the resurrection, and what they mean for the people who believe. He mentions that Jesus was born of a woman and born under the law (Galatians 4:4) and that he was born of a virgin (the earliest attestation we have of the idea, though expressed in theological terms, not as a story). But Paul does not tell us where Jesus was born, who his parents were, or anything about his childhood. Paul's silence is genuine. It is not a gap the later Gospels fill with independent information; it is a different kind of interest altogether.

Mark is the next earliest Gospel, most scholars placing it around 70 CE. Mark contains no infancy narrative and no mention of Jesus' life before the baptism. After a short prologue about John the Baptist and a voice from heaven, the adult Jesus appears at the Jordan and the story begins. Mark is the earliest source for the life of Jesus, and its first word about Jesus is what he was doing as an adult. The earlier Gospels we do not have might have told us more, but Mark is what we have, and Mark is silent.

Matthew and Luke, written in the 80s by most estimates, are the Gospels that add birth narratives. They are the ones that give the story a beginning. But they do not give it the same beginning. Matthew opens with a genealogy, a virgin birth, a star, Magi, Herod's court, a flight to Egypt, and a

return to Nazareth. Luke opens with a different set of scenes: an angel's announcement to Mary, a visit to Elizabeth, a census, shepherds in the fields, a presentation at the temple in Jerusalem. The two narratives are not just different; they do not fit each other. Matthew has the family in Bethlehem at the birth; Luke has them travelling to Bethlehem for a census and then returning to Nazareth. Matthew has them fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod; Luke has no flight at all. Neither Mark nor John knows the infancy material. Mark has nothing; John opens with theology ("the Word became flesh") rather than a story.

The reader who comes to this book expecting the silent years to be filled will not find that here. The reader who comes expecting the birth narratives to be treated as factual reports will not find that either. What the reader will find is the real shape of the sources and a plain explanation of what those sources are doing.

The birth narratives are worth understanding, but they are not reports in the way a historian would use that word. A historian does not throw them out; a historian reads them for what they are. Matthew's story is making claims about Jesus' significance — his Davidic lineage, the providential shape of his arrival, the pattern of an Old Testament figure saved by flight to Egypt and returned. Luke's story is making claims of a different kind — prophetic announcement, temple presence, the involvement of the margins (shepherds, a young unmarried woman) in the arrival of something new. Both are theological statements written in narrative form. Both are part of the earliest Christian tradition. Both are compositions, shaped by purpose, and the historian can read them without pretending they are either factual reports or worthless fiction.

This is not a dismissive position. It is a careful one. The birth narratives are part of the tradition about Jesus, and they matter. They tell us what the early movement said about Jesus' arrival. They tell us that the claim of a virgin birth appears in Paul, in Matthew, and in Luke — which is to say that the idea was in the air early. They tell us that the movement attached significance to where Jesus came from, even if the sources cannot agree on the details. But they do not give us a verifiable biography of Jesus' first years, and the honest thing to do is to say so.

The disagreements between Matthew and Luke are themselves evidence. The fact that the two Gospels cannot be combined into a single consistent story is evidence that the infancy tradition was not fixed in the way the adult Jesus' actions were. The adult Jesus — the one who spoke, ate, travelled, argued, was baptised, was crucified — is the secure part of the record. The birth stories are the part that was still being written, shaped, and theologised when the Gospels were produced. Mark's silence on the whole question is the earliest witness we have to the shape of the tradition, and Mark's silence is significant. The earliest Gospel did not think it needed a birth narrative to begin. Whatever Jesus was, the movement began with a man, not with a birth.

It is tempting to fill the gap. The thirty years are a temptation because a life without a childhood is incomplete in the imagination, and the reader who wants a life of Jesus wants the whole shape of it. But filling the gap means inventing scene, and the book's commitment is not to invent scene and present it as fact. The chapter that opens this Part — chapter 5 — ended with the last solid ground before the silence: the work, the trade, the body of a builder, the family on wages, the village four miles from a city that was being built. That is the last verifiable thing in Jesus' early life. After that, the text goes quiet.

What can we say that we actually know about the period? A small list, and it is small on purpose. Jesus was known as a *tektōn* from Nazareth — the only trade identification in the Gospels, from Mark 6:3. He was about thirty when he began his public work (Luke 3:23). He had brothers — James, Joses, Judas, Simon — and at least some sisters, named without being counted (Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55–56). He was known in his home town and rejected there (Mark 6:1–6, parallel in Matthew). He was baptised by John at the Jordan — the most secure single event in the Gospels, and the chapter that follows this one will say why. He began a public ministry that lasted somewhere between one and three years. He died by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, during Pilate's prefecture (26–36 CE). That is the shape of the known life outside the silence.

What cannot be said must be named as such. We cannot say where Jesus was born. The tradition says Bethlehem, and Bethlehem is where the Davidic claim attaches. But a Nazareth labouring family being born in Bethlehem is not impossible, and it is also not what the Nazareth tradition suggests, and Bethlehem appears in the infancy narratives that are themselves shaped. We cannot resolve the question. We cannot say that Joseph and Mary were from Bethlehem originally and moved to Nazareth, or that they were from Nazareth and went to Bethlehem for a census, or that either of those stories is a theological construction. We cannot know.

We cannot say what Jesus' childhood was like. No source gives it. We cannot fill it in and we should not pretend to. The temptation is strong and the market is full of books that do it — invented scenes, charming or dramatic, placed in the gaps and sold as the lost years. This book is not doing that. The silence is not a vacancy to be filled; it is a fact about the sources, and the honest treatment of it is to explain the fact and then let the silence stand.

We cannot say how long the public ministry lasted, precisely. "One to three years" is the range that the Synoptic tradition allows, derived from the number of festival trips possible if Jesus went to Jerusalem at Passover once or twice. The Fourth Gospel is constructed around multiple Passovers and implies a longer ministry, but the Fourth Gospel is also the latest and the most shaped, and its structure may reflect theological arrangement rather than chronological reporting. The honest answer is "somewhere between one and three years, most likely," and the rest is estimate.

There is one more detail worth naming here, because it is the one piece of the infancy tradition that appears in the earliest layer of the source. The claim that Jesus was born of a virgin is attested in Paul (Galatians 4:4 says "born of a woman, born under the law," and the wider tradition in 1 Corinthians carries the claim), in Matthew's narrative, and in Luke's narrative. That is to say, the idea — the theological claim about how Jesus came into the world — is in the air from an early point. But the idea appearing early is not the same as a story of the event being in the air early. Paul does not tell a birth story; Matthew and Luke do, and they tell different ones. The reader who wants to know whether the virgin birth happened as described in Matthew or Luke has no source that will answer that question for them. The historian can say that the claim was made early and that the narratives that place it in scene are later and divergent; the historian cannot say more than that.

We cannot say why the sources are silent on the early years. We can offer reasons, and they are reasons, not facts. The Jesus movement began with an adult man who did things and said things; what drew people was him as an adult, not his birth. Ancient life-writing did not always begin at the beginning of a life — it began at the decisive moment. The sources we have are interested sources, writing to make a case about who Jesus was and what God did through him, and a literal birth

narrative was not what every author needed. These are historical reasons, and they are plausible, and they are not the same as certainty. We should say them as reasons and not dress them up as knowledge we do not have.

The reader should finish this chapter with a clear sense of the gap and a clear sense of what surrounds it. The thirty years before the baptism are silent for reasons that are historical and understandable, not conspiratorial and not accidental. The sources do not tell us what happened in them. The sources that do try — Matthew and Luke — are telling us something other than a factual biography, and they do not tell the same story. The fact that Mark, the earliest Gospel, has nothing of the kind is evidence that the birth stories are not the earliest or most secure thing the tradition knew about Jesus. The earliest thing is the adult man at the Jordan.

There is also a more specific kind of silence worth naming, because it is the silence that affects how the rest of the book reads. The early sources are interested in Jesus' death and resurrection and the meaning of those events. They are not interested, in the same way, in Jesus' life between birth and baptism, and they are not interested in giving the reader a ground-level account of his years as a *tektōn*. That means the story we can tell about Jesus is lopsided toward the end of his life. The secure part of the record is his adult public work: what he said, whom he ate with, the disputes he had, the walk to Jerusalem, the arrest, the hearings, the cross, the aftermath. The part before that — the childhood, the work years, the family's daily life, the father's death, the husband's relationship to his wife and children, the ordinary things a person would know about a person they lived beside — is mostly unavailable to us. We know the shape of the man from the outside: what he was known as, what trade he held, what family he came from, what town he was from, what age he was at the start of the public work. We do not know him from the inside of those thirty years.

That does not mean the silence is empty. It means the silence is not filled with the kind of detail the reader might want. The chapter that precedes this one gave us the household on wages, the body of a builder, the walk to Sepphoris, the mother managing the food and cloth and children. Those are things we can say with hedged confidence because the economy is real and the family is named and the trade is attested. But the actual days — the morning Jesus himself woke, the work he himself did, the years Joseph lived or did not live in the house, the arguments between James and his brothers, the meals, the Sabbath rhythms of the Nazareth household in the years before the public work — those are not recoverable. The chapter that opened this Part said the last solid ground before the silence is the work and the family and the village. It did not mean we can stand on that ground and see the things that happened on it. It meant we can stand on that ground and see the shape of what the ground was: wages, margin, a large family, a man with the body of a builder, a village four miles from a city being built. The details of the days themselves are the silence.

This is a harder thing for a reader to carry than a filled-in childhood, and it is worth saying plainly why. A filled-in childhood gives the reader the feeling of knowing the person from the beginning. It satisfies the expectation that a life is a story with a beginning, middle, and end. But the real Jesus does not come to us that way. The real Jesus comes to us as an adult man at the Jordan, with a reputation as a builder from Nazareth, with a family large enough to matter, with a public work that begins and ends in unusual ways. The gap is not a defect in the story; it is the shape of the early record. The honest book does not paper over the gap; it tells the reader what the gap is and why it is there and what the reader can and cannot do with it.

The chapter that follows will turn to the man who was waiting at the Jordan when Jesus arrived — John the Baptist, the wild man in the desert, the best-attested figure in the region at this moment across multiple sources, and the one whose death we can date with some confidence. The silence of the thirty years ends at the river. Before the silence, there is the work and the family and the village. After the silence, there is the man at the river and the voice that went before him.

The Wild Man at the River

The thirty years of silence ended in the previous chapter at the river. The man waiting there is John the Baptist, and he is the first named figure the reader meets in the public story of Jesus. But John is not a shadow figure who exists only to prepare the way for someone else. That reading belongs to the later tradition, which shaped him as the forerunner. As a historical figure, John is substantial in his own right — a Jewish prophet in a Jewish landscape, with a following and a movement and a death that mattered. He is known from all four Gospels, from Josephus, and from Acts. That is a wider attestation base than Jesus himself has for many of the same years. The historian can say, with more confidence than the historian can usually say, that a man named John was baptising people in the Jordan country in the late twenties of the Christian era, that he had a following large enough to be noticed by the tetrarch, and that he was killed by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee.

John appears in the sources as a real person with a real following, not a storybook hermit. The Gospels describe him in the wilderness of Judea, at the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People went out to him from the whole Judean countryside and from Jerusalem, and were baptised by him in the river, confessing their sins. Luke gives the same setting with more precision about the political moment: the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, when Pilate was prefect of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, and Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. That fifteenth year of Tiberius — 28 or 29 of the Christian era — is the date around which scholars place John's appearance and therefore the start of Jesus' public work. It is the first thing in the public story that can be dated with any confidence.

The detail that signals John's identity to anyone who knew the Jewish scriptures is his clothing. Mark says he wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist — the same description used for Elijah in the second book of Kings, where the prophet is introduced wearing a hairy garment with a leather belt. Mark names the connection directly. The readers of Mark would have heard it immediately. Elijah appears in the Jewish prophetic tradition as the one who did not die — taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire — and who was expected to return before the day of the Lord. The book of Malachi promises that God will send Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. John is dressed like Elijah and operates in the wilderness like Elijah — the wilderness is where Elijah fled, where he was fed by ravens, where he met Elisha at the Jordan. The people who heard John would have heard those echoes. The meaning of the dress is not a personal affectation; it is a signal that this man belongs in the line of the prophets.

His diet was locusts and wild honey, and the detail matters because it tells the reader how John lived and how he was distinguished from ordinary life. Locusts and wild honey are food from the wild, not from a house or a market or a field. They are the food of someone who does not belong to the settled economy. The point is not that John was peculiar; the point is that John was visibly outside the

ordinary economy of the region. He did not live by wages, and he did not live by land. He lived by a movement that brought people to him and a body that could survive on what the wilderness offered. The observer in the first century who heard about John would not have imagined a man with a practice and a clientele. The observer would have imagined a man who lived outside the ordinary order and spoke from outside it.

His preaching was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and the phrase — baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins — is Mark's, and it is the phrase that defines the act. A baptism in the first century was a washing, a ritual immersion in water. John's baptism was a one-time act, not a repeated ritual washing. It was connected to repentance — the turning away from whatever stood between a person and God — and to the forgiveness of sins. It was not the Christian baptism that comes later, and it was not part of the ordinary Jewish practice of the time. It was John's own act, attached to his own message.

Luke gives the fullest version of what John said to the people who came to him. He tells the three groups — the crowds, the tax collectors, the soldiers — what to do. The crowds were to share what they had with anyone who had none. The tax collectors were to collect no more than they were authorised to collect. The soldiers were to do violence to no one, to extort no one, and to be content with their pay. This is not a theoretical teaching about a future kingdom. It is a set of instructions for people living in a present economy under Herod's rule, where tax farmers and soldiers and ordinary people all operated inside a system that the rich shared and the poor struggled in. John told them to live differently inside it now, before anything changed. Repentance, in John's teaching, was not only a change of mind; it was a change of action, and it was something a person could do the next morning in the place they were already living.

John also announced that someone more powerful than him was coming after him — someone whose shoes he was not worthy to untie, someone who would baptise not with water but with the Holy Spirit. Mark and Matthew give the announcement, and Matthew adds a version that says with fire. The announcement matters because it is the point at which John's movement becomes connected to the movement the reader is following. John says that a more powerful one is coming, and the Gospels then introduce that more powerful one as Jesus. The connection is made by John, before Jesus himself has said anything in the public story. That is the shape of it: John prepares the way, and the way leads to the one John points toward.

This is the point at which the reader should be careful not to overstate John's role as a forerunner. It is tempting, reading the Gospels, to see John as little more than the man who prepared the way for Jesus — a preface, a warm-up, a single chapter in the story of someone else. That reading is available in the later tradition. But John is not a preface in the historical record. He is a major figure in his own right, with a movement that existed before Jesus arrived and a death that happened in the middle of the story, not at the edges. The baptism that the reader is about to reach in the next chapter is the known intersection of the two movements, but it is not the whole of John's significance. This chapter is about John, and the next chapter is about the moment Jesus comes to the river. Both need to be read on their own terms.

The death of John is the event that shows how substantial he was. He did not die quietly. He did not fade away. He was killed, and the killing mattered enough that two very different sources both record it and give reasons for it.

Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, gives one account. He says that John was a good and virtuous man who urged the Jews to virtue and to righteousness, and that Herod Antipas feared that John's influence on the masses might lead to a revolt. Antipas therefore had him killed, not because of any action John had taken, but because Antipas thought the man's influence was a political danger. This is a political reason. It makes John a threat because he was persuasive, and because persuasion among a large following can become dangerous to a ruler who is himself subject to Rome.

The Gospels give a different account. Mark, Matthew, and Luke all tell the story of John's death in terms of a domestic conflict. Herod Antipas had married Herodias, who had been the wife of his brother. John objected to the marriage, saying that it was not lawful. Herodias bore a grudge against John because of it, and wanted him dead. Herod himself was reluctant — he respected John, the Gospels say, and protected him for a time — but eventually he gave in. In Mark's version, the occasion is a birthday feast. Herod makes a promise in front of his guests, and his step-daughter — the daughter of Herodias, not of Herod — asks for John's head at her mother's urging. Herod, having made the promise, gives the order. John is killed.

The two accounts are not the same, and they are not meant to be combined into a single consistent story. They are different emphases, from different sources, on the same event. Josephus gives the political reason. The Gospels give the domestic reason. The historian can say that John was killed by Antipas, and that the reason is disputed between the sources. A weak king who made a rash promise is not incompatible with a ruler who feared a popular leader. The story of the birthday feast and the dance and the promise is a story about a grudge and a man who could not say no. The story of political fear is a story about a ruler who saw a crowd and worried about what it might do. Both can be true in the sense that both are given by early sources. Neither excludes the other.

What the reader should not make of the Herodias story is a morality tale about a bad woman and a good prophet. The story as told in the Gospels is about a grudge and a weak king. Herodias wanted John dead because he had offended her. That is the motive the story gives, and it is not transparent beyond that. The historian's job is to report the story as the sources give it, not to turn it into a lesson about gender or power or anything else. The story is part of the tradition about John's death, and it is part of the tradition that is available. It is not the only part. Josephus is the other part. Both are early. Both are given.

The dating of John's death is less precise than the dating of his appearance, but it is not without shape. John was killed before the crucifixion of Jesus — the Gospels place John's death before Jesus' public ministry in earnest, and Acts 19:1–7 describes disciples of John still in Ephesus at the end of the first century, baptised into John's movement and not yet having heard of the Holy Spirit. That is the evidence that John's movement outlasted him. His death happened in the window between the start of John's public work, around 28–29 CE, and the crucifixion of Jesus, which the book places at 30 CE with 33 as the alternative. The death was in between. That is all we can say with confidence. No precise date survives.

What we cannot know about John is worth naming, because it keeps the chapter honest. We cannot say exactly where John operated. The Jordan is the location, and the wilderness of Judea is the setting, but the specific spots named in the Gospels — Bethany beyond the Jordan, and the like — are places we cannot pin on archaeology with confidence. We cannot say how many people followed him. The Gospels imply crowds; Josephus implies political influence. No numbers survive. We

cannot say exactly what John meant by the baptism, beyond the phrase given in Mark — a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The ritual washing, the one-time act, the symbolism of repentance and the washing away of sins — those are clear enough. The precise theology of the act, what John thought it accomplished beyond what the sources say, is not recoverable. We cannot say what the exact relationship was between John's movement and Jesus' movement before the baptism. The baptism is the known intersection. What John thought when Jesus came to the river, and what Jesus thought when he went to John, are not recorded.

These are not gaps that can be filled by good reasoning. They are limits of the sources, and the chapter should say so plainly. The reader who comes to John expecting a fully recoverable biography will not find one. The reader who comes expecting a figure made of later legend will not find that either. What the reader will find is a real man who lived in a real place, preached a real message, gathered a real following, and was killed for reasons the sources give in two different forms. That is enough to make him one of the best-known figures in the region at this moment, and it is enough to make him the figure who stands at the river waiting for the man who comes to him.

John's movement did not end with his death. Acts 19, at the end of the first century, describes people in Ephesus — in Asia Minor, far from the Jordan — who had been baptised into John's movement and had not yet heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul meets them and asks them, in effect, whether they received the Spirit when they were baptised, and they say no, they were only baptised into John's baptism. Paul explains that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and that John himself pointed to the one who was coming after him, and that these people should be baptised into Jesus. The point for this chapter is not that Paul corrects them; the point is that John's movement had spread and had outlasted John by decades, and that people were still baptised into John in the name of John, without the Jesus movement attached. John's death did not kill his movement. It left a current that ran on, in some places into the Jesus movement and in some places alongside it, and the reader should understand that John was not a moment. He was a movement, and movements survive their founders in ways that moments do not.

This is also the point at which the reader should see John differently from the familiar picture of him as a lone wild man in the desert, eccentric and marginal. John is a major figure in his region at this moment, known to the tetrarch, heard of by the crowds, and remembered in multiple sources. The "wild man" language of the brief is about his appearance and location, not his marginal status. He is not marginal. He is the best-attested person in the region at this moment across sources that cross-check each other in ways Jesus' own story cannot always claim. A prophet with a following, a baptiser of repentance, a man in camel's hair with a leather belt and a diet of locusts and wild honey, preaching in the wilderness of Judea at the Jordan — that is the figure the sources give us, and that is the figure the reader should meet.

The chapter that follows will turn to the moment Jesus himself enters the story at the river — the baptism, the most secure event in the Gospels. The reason it is the most secure is the embarrassment problem: the church would not have invented a story that made the sinless Jesus look like he needed a baptism of repentance from John. That is the principle the reader will learn in the next chapter, and it is the principle that will govern how the reader reads the rest of the public story. Before the silence, there is the work and the family and the village. After the silence, there is John at the river and the voice that went before him. And then, at the water, Jesus himself.

The Day He Got in the Water

The baptism of Jesus at the Jordan is the most secure single event in the Gospels. Not the birth — that is disputed between Matthew and Luke and absent from Mark. Not the miracle stories — those are reports of things said to have happened, and the historian reads them carefully, with the range of what "healing" meant in that world fully in view. Not the crucifixion — that is secure too, but it is the shape of the ending, not the beginning. The baptism is the event the sources agree on in its broad terms and that the church would not have invented, for reasons the reader should understand and then carry forward as a tool for the rest of the book. This chapter makes that case.

The event is simple to describe. Jesus comes from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan, where John is baptising, and John baptises him. At the moment of the baptism — or the moment of coming up out of the water — the heavens are opened, torn, or split, depending on the Gospel; the Spirit descends on him like a dove; and a voice speaks from heaven, addressing him as God's Son, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased. That is the event in its shared shape. The four Gospels give it in four versions, and the version a reader knows depends on which Gospel they have spent more time with.

Mark, who writes first, gives the simplest version. Jesus is baptised by John. He comes up out of the water. He sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove. A voice comes from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark does not say who else saw the torn heavens or the descending Spirit or heard the voice. He does not say whether John heard it. He does not say whether the crowd heard it. The voice addresses Jesus directly, privately, and the event is presented as something that happened to Jesus without Mark telling us the full public witness of it. This simplicity is one of the reasons the chapter begins with Mark's version. It is the earliest account, and it is the one with the least editorial addition layered on.

Matthew has a different version, and the difference is not small. In Matthew, Jesus comes to John to be baptised, but John refuses — he says he needs to be baptised by Jesus and asks why Jesus has come to him. Jesus answers, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." John then consents. At the baptism, the voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" — and the wording is addressed to the crowd, not to Jesus directly. Matthew has turned the baptism into a conversation and a public declaration. This is Matthew's way of handling an embarrassment that the other Gospels do not have to handle the same way, and the chapter will come back to the embarrassment before it is done.

Luke's version is closest to Mark's in shape but with one addition: Luke says that when Jesus was baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened. The voice in Luke, like Mark's, addresses Jesus directly: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Luke does not have the objection conversation that Matthew adds. Luke has the prayer, which is his own detail, and the private voice address, which he shares with Mark.

John's Gospel is the most different, but it still contains the baptism's meaning. John does not narrate the baptism scene the way the Synoptics do. Instead, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him and testifies: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The Gospel presents John the Baptist's recognition of Jesus as the event of the baptism's significance — John saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus, and that is how he knew that Jesus was the one. The baptism in John is told through the testimony of the baptiser, not through a narrated scene of the waters and the

voice. This is the latest Gospel, and its handling of the baptism is its own. It still preserves the event and the Spirit's descent and the identification of Jesus; it just tells it differently.

The reader should leave chapter 8 understanding that the four Gospels agree on the broad event — Jesus was baptised by John at the Jordan, the Spirit came down, and a voice spoke — and disagree on the handling of the details. That is a reasonable amount of agreement for an event this old, and it is enough to say the event is historical. The disagreement on the handling is also real, and the reader should not pretend otherwise. Mark has a private voice address and no objection conversation. Matthew has an objection conversation and a public voice address. Luke has the prayer and a private voice address. John has testimony and the Spirit's descent as the identifying sign. These four versions are not four witnesses to the same reported scene; they are four authors arranging the same tradition in different ways, and the historian reads that arrangement without pretending it collapses into a single transparent report.

But the source agreement is not the whole reason the baptism is the most secure event in the Gospels. The other reason is the embarrassment principle, and this is the argument the reader should learn here because the book will use it again. The embarrassment principle says that a story the early church would not have invented is more likely to be historical than a story they would have chosen to tell. The baptism of Jesus by John is such a story.

The reason is this. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people who came to him were persons who had something to turn from, and the water was the sign of the turn. If Jesus was the one the later tradition would call sinless, the one who forgave sins, the one who was God's Son in a special way — then the church would have had every reason not to tell a story in which that Jesus submitted to a baptism of repentance from a baptiser who preached repentance. The baptism makes Jesus look like a person who needed what John was offering. The later tradition did not need that story. It inherited it, and it had to explain it.

Matthew explains it in the text, with the objection-and-answer. John is right to object — the sinless one should not need John's baptism — but Jesus says the baptism is to "fulfill all righteousness," and John consents. Matthew is giving his readers a theological answer to a tension his own tradition had to carry. Mark and Luke handle the tension more quietly, by not drawing attention to it and by making the voice address Jesus privately rather than as a public spectacle. John handles it by shifting the focus to John the Baptist's testimony and the Spirit's descent as the identifying sign. All four Gospels have to deal with the same problem, because the problem is real and is baked into the event the sources inherit. The problem — why was the sinless one baptised by a repentance baptiser? — is itself evidence that the event happened. The church would not have invented a problem it then had to solve.

This is the principle the reader should take from this chapter and carry forward. It is a tool for reading the Gospels, and the book will use it again at the crucifixion, where the shameful death of a failed revolutionary would not have been invented by a church that wanted to proclaim a risen Lord, and at the family rejection in Mark 6, where the family coming to take Jesus home because they thought he had lost his mind is not the story the church would have started with. The principle is simple, and it is not absolute, but it is one of the most useful things the historian has: a story that is awkward for the later tradition is usually closer to what happened.

The reader should also understand what the baptism is and what it is not. It is the moment the public story of Jesus begins. The silence of the thirty years from chapter 6 ends at the river. The adult Jesus, about thirty, from Nazareth, a *tektōn*, with a family, enters the story in the most secure way the sources give. The baptism is the entry into the public record. It is not the beginning of Jesus' life — the man existed before it. It is the beginning of the story the Gospels tell. The reader should feel the shape of that: the silence is behind him now, and the story moves forward from the river.

The baptism is also the moment the tradition attaches its first explicitly christological claim. The voice from heaven calls Jesus "my Son, the Beloved." This is the earliest layer of the claim that Jesus is God's Son in a special way, and it is attached to an event the church inherited, not one it invented. The reader should understand that the Son-of-God language comes from this moment in the story, not from a later doctrinal decision imposed on it. The baptism is where the claim begins in the narrative, and the claim is part of the event the historian recovers.

What the baptism is not, the chapter should be clear, is a moment of ontological change. The baptism is not the moment Jesus becomes God's Son in a way that he was not before. The baptism is the moment the tradition records the claim that he is God's Son — the moment the voice speaks, the moment the Spirit descends, the moment the identification is made in the narrative. The reader should understand the difference between a tradition recording a claim at a moment and a later doctrine asserting a metaphysical change at that moment. The chapter does not resolve what the reader believes about the Son of God; it says what the sources do and when they do it.

What the reader should understand, before the chapter moves to the versions, is why the baptism matters as an event in the public story and not just as a moment of christological naming. The baptism is the moment at which Jesus enters the story that John has already begun. John is baptising and preaching and announcing that someone stronger is coming. Jesus comes to the river. The public story of Jesus does not begin with Jesus announcing the kingdom; it begins with Jesus going to the man who is already announcing the kingdom, and submitting to the baptism the man offers. That is a real sequence, and it matters for how the reader understands the relationship between Jesus and John. Jesus does not simply supersede John from outside; he enters John's movement at the point where John's movement is, and then the movement continues, with the same river and the same message and a new centre. The reader should feel the sequence: John at the river, the crowds, the baptism of repentance, the announcement that one stronger is coming, and then the stronger one arrives and is baptised by the man who announced him.

The chapter should also make clear, in passing, that the baptism is the moment at which the tradition's christological naming — the Son of God — first appears in the narrative. But the naming is not the same as the event. The event is the baptism; the naming is attached to it. The reader should understand that the tradition, in the earliest source (Mark), attaches the voice and the naming to the baptism, and that the voice's address — "You are my Son, the Beloved" — is the earliest layer of the Son-of-God claim in the narrative. This is not a later doctrine reading itself backward into the baptism; it is the earliest Gospel's own record of what the tradition says happened at the moment. The reader should feel the weight of that: the voice from heaven that calls Jesus God's Son is part of the event Mark records, and Mark records it before the later Gospels have added the objection conversation and the public address and the Temple pinnacle and the kingdoms. The earliest account has the naming. The reader should not import a Nicene Creed into the baptism, but the reader should

understand that the baptism is where the Son-of-God claim begins in the narrative, and that the claim is attached to an event the church inherited and did not invent.

What cannot be known and should not be asserted: whether the voice was heard by anyone else besides Jesus; whether the Spirit's descent was visible to the crowd; whether John saw the Spirit descend; what exactly was said between Jesus and John at the moment of the baptism (Matthew's objection conversation is the only version, and it is Matthew's, not a transcript); what Jesus was thinking when he went to the river; what John was thinking when Jesus arrived. The sources give us the event and some of the shape around it; they do not give us the interior thoughts or the exact visible spectacle. The chapter should not invent those things.

The dating of the baptism rests on the context Luke gives in chapter 3, where John's appearance is set in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, with Pilate prefect of Judea and Herod tetrarch of Galilee and Annas and Caiaphas high priests. Tiberius became emperor in 14 CE, so his fifteenth year is 28–29 CE. That is the window for the baptism, and it is the window for the start of Jesus' public work. The crucifixion comes later — the book sets it at 30 CE, with 33 as the alternative. The baptism is the beginning of the public story in that window. The reader should understand the dating as a range, not a fixed point, and as a range that depends on Luke's list of officials, which is the most dated account we have of the beginning of the public story. The historian can use Luke's context as the basis for the dating without pretending the dating is exact. "About 28–29 CE" is the honest answer, with the range and the uncertainty attached.

The chapter that follows will move into the wilderness after the baptism — the forty days, the testing, the confrontation with what the mission will cost. The baptism is the entry; the wilderness is the testing. The Spirit descends at the river, and then Jesus is led into the wilderness. The forty days come next.

What the reader should carry out of this chapter is threefold. First, the baptism is the most secure event in the Gospels because the church would not have invented it — the embarrassment principle. Second, the four Gospels tell the baptism differently, and the differences are real and worth understanding, not papering over. Third, the baptism is the entry into the public story, the end of the silence, and the moment the tradition attaches its first major christological claim. The wilderness and the forty days come next, and the testing of the man who has just been declared God's Son is the chapter that follows.

Forty Days

The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness immediately after the baptism. Mark says so with the shortest and most direct sentence in the Gospels about what happened next: "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness." The word "drove" is a strong one — not a suggestion, not a quiet leading, but a force that sent him out. The reader has just seen the baptism and heard the voice calling Jesus God's Son; the next thing Mark tells us is that the Spirit sent him into the desert. That is the movement the chapter follows: from the river, where the public story began, to the wilderness, where it was tested before it began in earnest.

The wilderness was the place of testing in the Jewish tradition, and Jesus went there as a Jew who knew the tradition and knew the Scripture. Israel had been tested in the wilderness for forty years after the Exodus, wandering and failing and learning what it meant to be the people of the God who had liberated them. David had fled into the wilderness. Elijah had fled into the wilderness and been fed by ravens and met God at Horeb. The wilderness was not an empty place in the Jewish imagination; it was the place where the relationship between God and the people was formed and tested and remade. Jesus going into the wilderness was not a retreat for clarity. It was a confrontation with what the mission would cost, and with the shape of the man who would carry it.

The number of days is the one the tradition gives: forty. The Spirit drove him into the wilderness; he was there forty days. The reader should hear the number the way the tradition meant it to be heard — the biblical number of testing and formation. Forty days of Jesus in the wilderness echoes forty years of Israel in the wilderness; the man who goes into the desert recapitulates the people who went into the desert before him. The number is meaningful; the literal duration is not a historical datum we can verify, and the chapter should not pretend otherwise. The tradition says forty days; the reader should understand why the number forty is there and not press it into a diary entry.

The fast is part of the tradition too. Matthew says Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights and was hungry afterwards. Hunger is the expected result of forty days without food, and the hunger is the point — the body is empty and weak and the testing begins from that condition. The reader should understand the fast as the physical reality that sets up the testing, the body stripped down to the need that the temptations will address. The first temptation is about bread. The fast makes the bread real.

Mark's account is the shortest and also the earliest, and it gives a picture of the wilderness testing that is sparse and vivid. Jesus is in the wilderness; he is tempted by Satan; he is with the wild animals; and the angels wait on him. "With the wild animals" is Mark's phrase, and it is a phrase worth hearing carefully. It does not mean Jesus was wrestling lions. It means the wilderness was a dangerous place, the kind of place where wild animals lived and a man alone was at risk. The world into which Jesus went was not a safe meditation garden; it was the desert where a person could be harmed, where the isolation was real. The angels waiting on him is the counterweight — the presence that comes after the testing, the care at the end. Mark's version is a skeleton of the testing: into the wilderness, the temptation, the wild, the angels. The later Gospels add the content of the temptation.

Matthew and Luke both add three specific temptations, and they agree on the three themes while differing on the order. The reader should understand that the three themes are the tradition's account of the testing and that the order differs between the two Gospels. The chapter should not present one order as the true one and the other as a mistake. The themes are what matter, and the themes are about the shape of the mission.

The first theme is the bread — the stones turned into loaves. The tempter says, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Jesus has been fasting and is hungry; the temptation is to use the power that the voice at the baptism said belonged to him in order to feed himself. The answer is from Deuteronomy: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The testing here is about whether the Son of God will use his position for his own needs in a way that short-circuits the mission. The answer is that the mission is not about self-feeding, and that life is more than bread.

The second theme is the Temple pinnacle — the jump. The tempter takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up.'" The temptation is to use God's protection as a spectacle — to force God to act in a visible way, to make a public demonstration of divine rescue. Jesus' answer is, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." The testing here is about whether the mission will use spectacular proof to compel belief, to force God's hand in public. The answer is that God should not be tested, that spectacle is not the way.

The third theme is the kingdoms — the power. The tempter shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour and says, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." The temptation is to achieve the goal of the mission — the kingdom, the rule of God breaking into the world — by a wrong alliance, by taking the power that belongs to God's rule through the route of compromise with the power that opposes it. Jesus' answer is, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." The testing here is about whether the kingdom will be achieved by the wrong kind of power, by an alliance with the wrong master. The answer is that worship belongs to God alone.

These three themes, in any order, are the content of the testing: bread, spectacle, kingdoms. They are not moral lessons about personal temptation in the modern sense. They are about the shape of the mission and the identity Jesus received at the baptism. The voice said "You are my Son, the Beloved." The testing asks, in different forms: what does it mean to be the Son in the desert, when the body is hungry, when the spectacle is offered, when the kingdoms are there for the taking? The answer each time is that the Son of God does the mission in God's way, without shortcuts, without spectacle, without wrong alliance. The testing is about the mission, not about personal holiness.

The order of the temptations differs between Matthew and Luke, and the difference matters. In Matthew, the Temple pinnacle is the second temptation, and the final temptation is the kingdoms on the high mountain. In Luke, the order is bread, then the kingdoms, then the Temple pinnacle — and the episode ends in Jerusalem at the Temple, with the devil departing "until an opportune time."

Luke's order makes the Temple the climax, and his ending is a forward-looking note: the testing is not over after the forty days; the devil returns later at the right moment. Matthew's order makes the kingdoms the climax, and ends on the mountain with the worship question. Both orders are editorial choices, and both matter for how each Gospel reads the rest of the story. The historian can say the three themes are common and the order differs, and the reader should understand that the tension between the orders is itself evidence that the testing tradition was not frozen in a single fixed form.

What the chapter cannot know and should not assert: whether the specific words of the temptations were spoken as Matthew and Luke narrate them; whether Jesus was literally with wild animals in the way Mark's phrase suggests (the phrase is Mark's, and it is vivid; its literalness is not a historical datum we can verify); whether Satan appeared as a person in the testing or as a representation of the adversarial force the tradition knew; whether the angels waited on him literally. The chapter should report what the sources say without forcing either a literal or a purely metaphorical reading where the sources do not settle the question.

The forty days end and the public work begins. Mark's skeleton of the testing — the Spirit drove him out, the temptation, the wild, the angels — ends with the angels waiting. Matthew and Luke add the content of the temptations and end with the devil's departure. The testing is over; the man who has been declared God's Son and tested in the wilderness now enters the public story. The chapter that

follows will move to Capernaum, the fishing village on the lake that becomes the base of operations. The wilderness was the testing; Capernaum is the beginning of the movement in the world of villages and the lake.

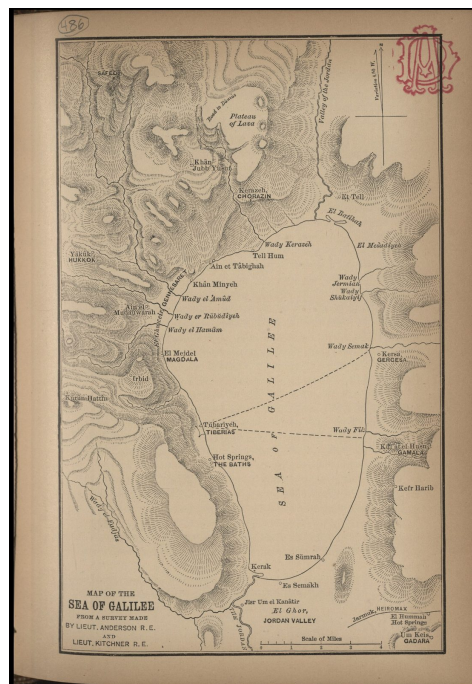
The reader should leave this chapter with three things. First, the forty days are the testing of the man who has just been declared God's Son, and the testing is about the shape of the mission — the bread, the spectacle, the kingdoms — not about personal morality. Second, the testing places Jesus inside the Jewish wilderness tradition: Israel tested in the wilderness, and Jesus recapitulates that testing as the one who is Israel's representative and who will redefine what the relationship with God looks like. Third, the wilderness ends and the world begins again — the public work starts not in the desert but in the villages and the lake, where the next chapter will place the reader. Capernaum comes next.

Part Three: The Movement

Capernaum

Jesus left Nazareth and did not go back. That is the first thing this chapter has to say, and it is a bigger thing than it sounds. The village of four hundred, the village on a ridge north of the lake, the village where he grew up in a *tektōn* household on wages and margin — he left it and the story of his public work does not return to it in the way the earlier life did. The Gospels do not have him going home to Nazareth to set up the ministry. He goes to Capernaum instead, on the shore of the lake, and Capernaum becomes the base from which the rest of the public work moves.

The break with Nazareth matters because it is the break with the village the reader has spent two chapters inside. Chapter 5 gave the reader the household on wages, the body of a builder, the walk to Sepphoris, the family large enough to matter, the village four miles from a city being built. Chapter 6 gave the reader the thirty years of silence that end when the adult Jesus appears at the Jordan. Chapter 7 gave the reader John the Baptist, the wild man at the river, the best-attested figure in the region at this moment. Chapter 8 gave the reader the baptism — the most secure event in the Gospels, the entry into the public story. And then, after the baptism and the testing in the wilderness, Jesus leaves Nazareth and makes a new base on the lake. The village of his upbringing is not the village of his ministry.



The Sea of Galilee and its shore villages — Magdala, Tiberias, and, across the water, the Decapolis. (Map: Survey of Western Palestine, Anderson & Kitchener, 1880s; public domain.)

The village of his ministry is Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is a fishing village, not a city, not a regional capital, not a place that would have mattered to anyone without the story attached to it. It matters to the story because it sits at a node on the lake that lets a peripatetic teacher move in every direction. The lake is the highway; the villages around it are the destinations; Capernaum is the place from which the movement radiates. The reader should understand the lake not as a scenic feature but as a road — the road by which people and news and fish and trade moved in the region, and the road by which Jesus moved from village to village in the course of his public work.

Matthew says Jesus "left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum" (Matthew 4:13), and Matthew uses the move to make a theological point, quoting Isaiah about the land of Zebulun and Naphtali and the people who sat in darkness seeing a great light. Matthew is doing the work of connecting the move to the Old Testament expectation of light coming to the northern territory. The reader should understand that Matthew is making a claim about the move — this is where the light comes on — but the historian can say the move itself is the thing the sources agree on, and Matthew's Isaiah claim is Matthew's framing, not a historical datum we can verify independently. The fact of the move to Capernaum is the agreement; the Isaiah framing is Matthew's.

Mark does not describe the move to Capernaum as a separate narrated event the way Matthew does. Mark says that after John's arrest, Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come near, and then, passing along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew and called them. Later, Mark says, "they went to Capernaum," and the Capernaum activity begins — teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the exorcism in the synagogue, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law at Peter's house, the crowds that gather at the door at evening. Mark establishes Capernaum as the base not by describing the move to it but by showing the activity concentrated there. The reader understands the base from the concentration of the action, not from a narrated relocation.

Luke is less explicit about Capernaum as the base. Luke has Jesus teaching in the Capernaum synagogue (the exorcism there, in Luke 4) and has Jesus leaving and going on to other places, but Luke does not name Capernaum as the residence in the same way Matthew does. The Capernaum activity is present in Luke, but the base is less sharply defined. The historian can say the Capernaum base is clear in Mark and Matthew and consistent with Luke, even if Luke does not name it in the same way. The reader does not need the sharpest possible agreement to understand that Capernaum is the centre of the public work in the Synoptic tradition.



The reconstructed synagogue at Capernaum — a later, white limestone building; beneath it lie the basalt foundations of the first-century synagogue archaeology has found. (Photo: David Shankbone, CC BY-SA 3.0.)

The archaeology of Capernaum supports the picture of a fishing village on the lake, though it does not prove everything the Gospels imply. The site is the place tradition calls Kefar Nahum, and the title is preserved in the Arabic Tell Hum. Excavations show a first-century fishing village with a synagogue — the white limestone synagogue that visitors see is later than the first century, built in the Byzantine period; beneath it is a basalt synagogue of the right period, the kind of synagogue a fishing village would have had. The village is the right kind of place for the story: a village on the lake with a synagogue, a place where a teacher could teach and a crowd could gather and the sick could be brought.

The house that tradition identifies as the house of Peter — the "house of Peter" — is a structure beneath a later Byzantine church built over it. The earliest phase of that house dates to the first century, and the tradition that it was Peter's house is the tradition the reader has inherited.

Archaeology is consistent with the tradition — the right period, the right location, the right kind of structure — but it cannot prove that the house was Peter's. The chapter should not assert the identification as fact. The reader should understand that the tradition says the house of Peter was in Capernaum and that the site is consistent with that tradition, and that the identification is a matter of tradition, not archaeological proof.

The house of Peter matters to the story because it is where things happened. In Mark, it is the house where the crowd gathers when Jesus returns to Capernaum — so crowded that there is no room, not even in front of the door, and the paralytic is lowered through the roof. It is the house where the sick are brought at evening, when the whole city gathers at the door. It is the house where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. The house of Peter is the centre of the Capernaum activity in the Synoptic tradition, the place from which the healing and the teaching and the gathering radiate. The reader should understand that the base of the movement in Capernaum was a house, not a synagogue or a hall or a public place. A house is the centre.

The household at the centre of the movement is itself worth noticing. Peter's mother-in-law is healed at the house — which means Peter is married, a fact the Gospels assume without comment and that the later tradition has had various things to say about. The reader should not be surprised by it; the Gospels present married men in the ministry as a matter of fact. The household of Peter is the first household of the movement, and the reader should feel that: the movement begins in a house, with a family, with a mother-in-law healed and the crowd gathering at the door. This is not the movement the reader might have imagined from the sermon-on-the-mount pictures; it is a movement that began in a fishing village house with nets and boats and a mother-in-law.

The first disciples are called beside the lake, in the work world of the fishermen. Mark's account is the earliest and the simplest: Jesus passes along the Sea of Galilee and sees Simon and Andrew, the brothers, casting a net into the sea — they are fishermen — and he says to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And they leave the nets and follow him, immediately. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, are called in the same scene, in their boat with their father Zebedee, mending the nets. They leave the father and the boat and follow.

The reader should understand the call as it happens — beside the lake, in the work, to men who are working. The metaphor "fish for people" is drawn from the fishing trade the reader has just seen in the village. The reader should not hear it as an abstract religious phrase but as a metaphor pulled from the work the men were doing the day they were called. To fish for people is to do for people what the fishermen had been doing for fish — to gather them, to bring them in, to work the net. The metaphor is from the Capernaum world, and the reader should understand it that way.

The immediate response — they leave the nets and follow immediately — is the shape of the call in Mark. The reader should understand that the call is not a long negotiation. It is a word spoken beside the lake, answered by the leaving of the work and the walking after the one who spoke. The reader should also understand that the call is not a free choice in the modern sense of the word; it is a response to a Jewish teacher in a Jewish world, and the response is the kind of response the tradition records. The immediacy is part of the story, but the historian should not press the immediacy into a romantic abandonment of family and livelihood. The father is left with the boat; that is a real thing; the brothers leave the nets; that is a real thing; the reader should feel the cost in the detail of the nets and the boat and the father without turning it into a sermon about sacrifice.

The reader should also understand that the calling of the first disciples is not the beginning of the public work — the ministry in Galilee has already begun by the time Mark calls the first disciples. The public work begins with the proclamation of the kingdom in Galilee after John's arrest. The calling of the first disciples is the formation of the inner circle that will travel with Jesus and, after his death, carry the movement on. The reader should understand the sequence correctly: the ministry begins, the proclamation is made, the first disciples are called, the base at Capernaum is established as the centre of the activity. The chapter's order is not a chronology of the first days; it is a geography of the base.

Capernaum is not grand, and the chapter should not make it grand. It is a fishing village. The reader should feel the village: the boats, the nets, the fish, the houses, the synagogue, the lake as the road, the households that fish and the households that eat fish and the households that smoke and salt and carry the fish to market. The village is subject to the same Herodian economy and Roman arrangement the reader has encountered before — the same building boom, the same tax, the same

margin between work and crisis. Capernaum is not a liberation from that world; it is a place inside it. The reader should understand that the base of the movement is inside the Herodian and Roman world, not outside it. The kingdom of God is going to break into that world from within.

The chapter that follows will turn to the message Jesus proclaimed when he came to Galilee — the kingdom of God in plain English, the pivotal chapter of Part Three. The reader has the base now, and the first followers, and the fishing village on the lake. What comes next is the message itself, stripped of the twenty centuries of meaning that have accumulated around it. The kingdom of God is not a place you go when you die; it is God's rule breaking into the present, and the invitation is to live inside that now. The chapter that follows will say that, plainly, and the reader will see what the kingdom meant to a man who had left the village of his upbringing and made a new base on the lake, among fishermen and the sick and the crowds that gathered at the door.

The Kingdom, in Plain English

The reader has the base now, and the first followers, and the fishing village on the lake where Jesus made his home after leaving Nazareth. What comes next is the message itself — the thing Jesus proclaimed as he walked through the villages of Galilee, the thing that summoned the fishermen from their nets and that would, in time, draw thousands of people and reorganise their lives around him. The message is the kingdom of God. This is the pivotal chapter of Part Three, and it is the chapter that every other chapter in this part flows from. If the reader misunderstands the kingdom here, the healings, the table, the disputes, the family problem, the road to Jerusalem, all of it will be misread. The chapter has to get the kingdom right — or rather, has to get it plainly, stripped of the two thousand years of accumulated meaning that the reader will bring to it.

The reader's default understanding of the kingdom of God is probably something like this: the kingdom is heaven, the place you go when you die if you have believed the right things. Or the kingdom is a spiritual state, the inner reign of God in the heart of the believer. Or the kingdom is the church, the community of the saved, and the kingdom is coming in the future when Jesus returns. All of these are later meanings, and all of them are real meanings in the tradition that grew up around Jesus. But they are not the meaning the reader will find in the Gospels if they read them as the sources present them. The kingdom of God in the mouth of Jesus is the rule of God breaking into the present — the reign of God arriving in the world now, in the ministry of Jesus, and the invitation to live inside that reign now. The kingdom is not a place you go when you die. It is a reality breaking into the world now, with a future culmination still to come.

The simplest version of the proclamation comes from Mark, the earliest Gospel, right at the beginning of Jesus' public work. Jesus comes to Galilee after John's arrest, proclaiming the good news of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." That is it. The time is fulfilled — the moment has arrived. The kingdom has come near — not fully here, not distant, but near. Repent and believe — turn and trust. This is the core of the message, and it is spare, and the spare-ness is itself a point. The reader should not look for a long theological exposition in the proclamation; the proclamation is a declaration and a summons, and the declaration is that the rule of God is arriving now, and the summons is to turn and enter it.

The word "kingdom" translates a Greek word — *basileia* — that means rule, reign, the domain of a king. The kingdom of God is the rule of God, the reign of God, the domain where God's will is done. When Jesus says the kingdom of God has come near, he is saying that God's rule is breaking into the present, that the world is not as it should be and God is acting to make it otherwise, and that the act is happening now, in Jesus' ministry, in the healings and the exorcisms and the table and the proclamation itself. The reader should hear "kingdom" as "rule" — not a territory on a map, not a destination after death, but the reign of God arriving in the world.

Matthew uses a different word — "kingdom of heaven" — instead of "kingdom of God," and the reader should understand that this is the same kingdom under a different name. Matthew's habit of saying "heaven" instead of "God" is a Jewish reverential practice, not a different theology. The kingdom of heaven in Matthew is the kingdom of God in Mark; the reader should not mistake the name difference for a theological difference. The kingdom is the rule of God, in both Gospels, breaking into the present.

The reader should also understand that the kingdom is not only future. The proclamation says the kingdom has come near, and the miracles and healings and exorcisms in the Gospels are presented as signs that the kingdom is breaking in now — the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them, as the Gospel of Matthew puts it in a quotation that crystallises the point. The kingdom is present in the sense that the rule of God is arriving now, in Jesus' ministry, and the reader should not lose that present-breaking-in strand. At the same time, the kingdom is also future, and the parables of the end — the weeds, the net, the wedding feast — are part of the kingdom teaching, pointing to a final consummation when the rule of God will be complete. The reader should hold both strands: the kingdom is breaking in now, and it is not yet complete; it is near, and it is coming.

This is the tension the reader should understand and not try to resolve. The sources contain both strands — the present-breaking-in and the future-consummation — and the historian cannot say with certainty how much of each was in Jesus' own mind. The reader should not expect the chapter to tell them whether Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet expecting the end of the world in the near future, or a preacher of a present breakthrough, or some combination of the two. The chapter can say that both strands are in the sources, and that the historian's job is to report both without resolving the tension that the sources themselves contain. The chapter that follows this one in the book's sequence — chapter 19 — will take up the apocalyptic question directly and will be the place where the most uncomfortable finding of modern scholarship is stated plainly. This chapter is not that chapter. This chapter is the plain statement of the message, and the plain statement is: the kingdom of God is the rule of God breaking into the present, now, with a future hope attached.

The message is taught in parables, and the parables are worth understanding, because they tell the reader something about the kingdom that a plain doctrinal statement would not. The parables are not lessons with clean morals; they are stories that refuse to hand the reader a tidy answer. The reader who expects the parables to teach neat principles will be disappointed; the parables are unsettling on purpose. The chapter should say this, and should then give the reader a few of the parables in their plain sense, so that the reader can hear the kingdom as Jesus taught it.

The parable of the sower is the most famous, and it is the one where Mark himself has to add an interpreter later, which is itself a point worth noticing — the parable does not explain itself in the

text, and the explanation is added. The seed is the word, the sower sows the word, and the different soils are the different responses the word meets. The kingdom goes out into the world and lands in different ground; some of it is taken away, some of it grows and is choked, some of it bears fruit. The parable is not about sowing method; it is about reception. The kingdom is a word that goes out and encounters different reception in the world, and the reader should understand the kingdom as something that is spoken and heard and either received or rejected, not as a doctrine that is merely taught.

The parable of the mustard seed is the parable of growth. The kingdom is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, that grows into a tree large enough for the birds to nest in. The point is that the kingdom starts small — a village on the lake, a fisherman, a tax collector, a handful of followers — and grows. The birds nesting in the branches is the shelter the kingdom provides, the place where the marginal find a home. The reader should hear the parable as a parable of growth and shelter, not as a parable of size. The kingdom is not impressive to start with; it grows.

The parable of the yeast is the parable of the kingdom working from within, invisibly, until the whole is transformed. The kingdom is like yeast that a woman mixes into the dough until the whole batch is leavened. The kingdom is not a visible spectacle; it is a transforming presence that works from within. The reader should hear the parable as a parable of quiet transformation, not of dramatic arrival.

The parable of the weeds is the parable of the mixed present. A man sows good seed in his field, and an enemy sows weeds among the wheat, and the householder says to let both grow together until the harvest, when the reapers will gather the weeds and burn them and the wheat will be gathered into the barn. The kingdom now contains both the good and the bad; the separation comes at the end. This is the parable that Matthew interprets, and the interpretation is the kingdom at the end, with the harvest and the fire. The reader should hear the parable as a parable of the coexistence of good and evil in the kingdom until the end, and of the future sorting.

The parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl are the parables of value. The kingdom is like treasure hidden in a field, and like a pearl of great value. The man who finds the treasure sells all he has to buy the field; the merchant who finds the pearl sells all he has to buy it. The kingdom is of such value that it reorganises a life. The reader should hear the parables as parables of total commitment to the kingdom, not as parables of how to get into it. The kingdom is worth everything.

The parable of the net is the same pattern as the weeds: the kingdom is like a net that gathers fish of every kind, and at the end the good are kept and the bad are thrown away. The mixed present, the future sorting. The reader should hear the parable as a parable of the end, when the kingdom is complete and the sorting happens.

The parable of the wedding feast is the parable of the invitation and the refusal. A king prepares a wedding feast for his son, and the invited guests refuse to come, and the king sends his servants to bring in whoever they find, and the feast goes on. The kingdom is the reign of God that receives the invited and the not-invited, and the refusal of the invited is the refusal that the kingdom addresses. The reader should hear the parable as a parable of the inclusion of the marginal and the refusal of the important.

These parables together give the reader the kingdom as Jesus taught it: the word going out and being received or rejected; the growth from small to large; the quiet transformation from within; the mixed present and the end; the total value; the invitation and the refusal. The reader should not hear the parables as a list of lessons but as a way of teaching the kingdom that resists neat summary. The kingdom is taught in stories that unsettle, and the reader should expect that.

The kingdom is also announced in the Beatitudes, and the Beatitudes are the kingdom as reversal. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the weeping — the kingdom belongs to them. Luke's version is the starkest: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." The kingdom is for the poor, the hungry, the weeping — the marginal, the ones the world has left out. The reversal is social: the kingdom is the rule of God that includes the marginal now, and the marginal are the ones to whom the kingdom is announced. The rich are warned — the rich fool who stores up wealth and is called a fool because his life is required that night, the warning that the kingdom is not a reward for wealth. The great banquet — the invited refuse, and the poor and crippled and blind are brought in. The kingdom is the rule of God that reverses the current order, and the reader should understand the reversal as a social reality, not as a spiritual metaphor.

The reversal is not only about the poor; it is about the whole order. The kingdom is the rule of God in which the last are first and the first are last, in which the meek inherit the earth, in which the merciful receive mercy, in which the pure in heart see God. The reader should understand the Beatitudes as the kingdom stated in terms of the reversal — the kingdom is the rule of God that overturns the current hierarchy and includes the marginal. The reader should not hear the Beatitudes as a list of nice sentiments but as a social claim about the direction of the kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer is the kingdom in a sentence. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The prayer is the distillation of the kingdom for the daily use of the followers. The kingdom is the rule of God coming, and the will of God being done on earth. The reader should hear the prayer as the kingdom compressed into a petition — the rule of God arriving, the will of God being done here, in the world. The prayer is not a wish for the future; it is a petition for the present, and the petition is that the rule of God break into the world now.

The kingdom is announced in the proclamation, taught in the parables, announced in the Beatitudes, distilled in the Lord's Prayer, enacted in the healings and the exorcisms, signalled in the table with the marginal. The reader should understand the kingdom as the rule of God breaking into the present, with a future culmination, and with the social reversal that includes the marginal. The kingdom is the central message of Jesus, and every other chapter in Part Three flows from it. The healings are signs of the kingdom breaking in; the table is the sign of the kingdom including the marginal; the disputes with the Pharisees are disputes over the right keeping of Torah inside the kingdom; the family problem is the cost of the kingdom in the life of the man who proclaimed it.

The reader should also understand what the kingdom is not, because the accumulated meaning the reader brings to the chapter is heavy and the chapter has to clear it away. The kingdom is not heaven as a destination after death. The kingdom is not the church as an institution. The kingdom is not a political program in the modern sense — it is the rule of God, and that is a different kind of thing from a political platform, though it has political implications. The kingdom is not an internal state only — it is a public reality, a reign, a rule, a new order. The kingdom is not only future — it is

breaking in now, in the ministry of Jesus. The kingdom is not only present — the future consummation is part of it.

The reader should leave this chapter with the kingdom stated plainly: the rule of God breaking into the present, now, in the ministry of Jesus, with a future hope attached, and with the social reversal that includes the marginal. The kingdom is the message Jesus proclaimed, and the message summoned people. The chapter that follows will introduce the people who answered the summons — the twelve men and the women who funded the ministry — and the reader will see what the kingdom looked like in the shape of a following.

The chapter that follows will turn to the people who followed Jesus — the twelve and the women, and the women especially, who are in the earliest sources at the funding of the ministry and at the cross and at the tomb, and who have been treated as a footnote in too many accounts of the movement. The kingdom summons people, and the people who answer are the ones who follow, and the following includes the women. The chapter that follows is the one that should put the women where they belong — at the centre of the funding, not at the edges.

The People Who Followed

The kingdom summons people, and the people who answer are the ones who follow. This chapter introduces the following that formed around Jesus as his public work moved through the villages of Galilee — the twelve men who made up the inner circle, and the women who funded the ministry and who were in the movement from the beginning, at the funding, at the cross, and at the tomb. The reader has seen the kingdom proclaimed in the previous chapter; this chapter shows the kingdom answering itself in the shape of a following, and the following includes the women, who have been treated as a footnote in too many accounts of the movement and who belong here, at the centre, as a matter of course.

The twelve are the inner circle. Mark gives the list — Simon, whom he named Peter; James and John, the sons of Zebedee, whom he named Sons of Thunder; Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. The list is a Synoptic tradition — Mark gives it, Matthew gives it close to Mark's version, Luke gives it close to Mark's version — and John does not give a list at all. The historian should not press the list into biographical detail the sources do not provide. The reader should understand the twelve as the nucleus of the movement, the ones called to be with Jesus and to be sent out, given authority to cast out unclean spirits and to preach. The dual purpose — presence and mission — is explicit in Mark. They are with him, and they are sent out. That is the shape of the inner circle.

The reader should also understand that the list includes the betrayer. Judas Iscariot is in the twelve. The tradition names him, and the tradition does not hide him. The reader should not expect the chapter to paper over that, but the chapter should also not make the betrayer the focus. The following is the subject of this chapter; the betrayal comes later. The betrayer in the list is a fact the reader should carry: the inner circle of the movement included the man who would hand Jesus over, and the

movement did not know at the time which of its own would do it. The reader should feel the weight of that — the intimacy of the circle, and the fact that the person who turned is one of its own.

The twelve are not the whole following. The reader should understand the following as a spectrum. The twelve are the inner circle. Beyond them is the larger group of disciples — the people who followed Jesus in the villages, who heard him teach, who were healed by him, who were part of the movement in a wider sense. And beyond them are the crowds — the people who came to the houses and the synagogues and the lakeshore to hear him and to be healed. The reader has seen the crowds at Capernaum, the whole city gathering at the door at evening. The crowds are part of the following, but they are not the twelve. The reader should understand the movement as a structure with layers: the twelve, the larger disciple group, the crowds.

The chapter that turns to the women is the chapter that should put them where they belong — not at the edges of the story but at the centre, as a matter of course. Luke 8 is the chapter in the Gospels that names the women who followed Jesus, and the reader should treat it as the bombshell the brief says it is. Luke writes that Jesus went through the cities and villages proclaiming the kingdom, and that the twelve were with him, and also some women — Mary, who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; and Susanna; and many others, who provided for them out of their means. The women provided for Jesus and the twelve from their own resources. The reader should hear that sentence and understand what it means: the movement was funded by women, and the women who funded it were named by Luke, and there were many others besides the three named.

The readers should not come to this chapter with the familiar picture of Mary of Magdala as a repentant prostitute rescued from a life of sin. That picture is a later tradition — from the sixth century, when Pope Gregory I conflated Mary of Magdala with the unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7 and with Mary of Bethany. The Gospels do not do that. The Gospels identify Mary of Magdala as a woman from Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, from whom seven demons had gone out. The seven demons are a description of a healing, not of sexual sin. The reader should understand Mary of Magdala as a follower of Jesus, a witness at the cross, a witness at the tomb, and the recipient of a resurrection appearance in John — the first person to whom the risen Jesus appears, in John's Gospel. The reader should not carry the prostitute myth into this chapter.

Joanna is the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. A steward is a manager of a household or an estate. Chuza manages Herod's affairs, which means Joanna is connected to the court of Herod — the same Herod Antipas whose building boom the reader encountered in chapter 5 and whose capital at Sepphoris is four miles from Nazareth. Joanna is not a marginal person; she is connected to the ruling household of the region, and she has means, and she uses those means to fund the ministry of Jesus. The reader should understand the irony of this — the wife of the steward of Herod, the tetrarch who killed John the Baptist and who will later be the one who hands Jesus over to Pilate's province, is one of the women funding the movement that Herod's household would eventually suppress. The reader should not overstate the irony; it is an irony the reader can notice, and the chapter should let the reader notice it without turning it into a sermon.

Susanna is named. Nothing else is said about her. The reader should not try to fill in what Luke does not say. Susanna is one of the women who followed, one of the women who provided for the

ministry, and that is what the source gives. The reader should not invent a story for Susanna. The chapter should let her stand as named, and as one of many.

The "many others" matters. Luke names three women and says there are many others. The reader should understand the list as not exhaustive. The women who followed Jesus were not just these three; they were many, and the tradition names only three. The reader should not assume that the three named are the only women in the movement, or that the women's role is limited to the three named. The chapter should make clear that the funding of the movement came from a group of women, and that Luke names three and says there are many others.

The reader should also understand that the women are not a marginal addition to the movement. They are part of it from the beginning, and they are in the earliest sources at the funding. Luke 8 is a Gospel, not a late addition, and the women are there from the start of the Galilean ministry in Luke's account. The reader should understand that the funding of the ministry by women is not a late or marginal fact; it is a fact about the shape of the movement, and the chapter should treat it as such.

The women are also present at the cross. Mark 15 names the women who were looking on from a distance when Jesus died: Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. They had followed him and ministered to him when he was in Galilee — the same women, or overlapping with the same women, who provided for the ministry in Luke 8. The reader should understand the continuity: the women who funded the ministry in Galilee are the women who are at the cross when Jesus dies. The women are in the movement at the funding and at the death, and the chapter should make that continuity clear. The reader should understand that the women who gave their means to support Jesus in Galilee were there, at a distance, when he died, and that they did not abandon the movement when it became dangerous.

The women are also present at the tomb. Mark 16 — the original ending of Mark — has the women going to the tomb early on the first day of the week, bringing spices to anoint the body. Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They are the ones who go to the tomb, and they are the first witnesses of the empty tomb in Mark. The reader should understand that the women who funded the ministry and were at the cross are also the women who go to the tomb. The continuity runs through the funding, the cross, and the tomb. The reader should understand that the women are witnesses of the full arc of the movement — the funding, the death, and the resurrection tradition.

The readers should understand that the women's presence at the tomb makes them the first witnesses of the resurrection if the empty tomb tradition is taken as historical. Mark's Gospel, the earliest, has the women at the tomb and the young man in white telling them that Jesus has been raised. The women are the first to know. The reader should understand that the resurrection tradition begins with the women, and that the women are the first witnesses of the empty tomb. The chapter that follows this one in the book's sequence is not the resurrection chapter — that comes much later, in Part Five and Part Six. But the reader should carry forward from this chapter the fact that the women are at the tomb, and that the resurrection tradition, however the reader understands it, begins with the women.

The chapter that follows will be chapter 13, on the stories that don't resolve — the parables. The reader should understand the following as the shape of the kingdom in action: the twelve, the larger disciple group, the crowds, and the women who fund it all. The parables in chapter 13 will be told to this following, and the reader should understand that the stories that don't resolve are told to people

who have already answered the summons. The kingdom has summoned them, and the stories are what the kingdom says to the people who have come.

The reader should leave this chapter with three things. First, the twelve are the inner circle, and the list includes the betrayer. Second, the following is not just the twelve; it includes the larger disciple group and the crowds. Third, the women are part of the movement from the beginning, and they fund it, and they are at the cross, and they are at the tomb, and they are in all three places in the Gospels. The women are not a footnote. They are in the earliest sources at the funding, at the cross, and at the tomb, and the chapter should write them in as a matter of course.

The chapter should also leave the reader with the understanding that the following is the shape of the kingdom in action — the kingdom has summoned people, and the people who answer form a movement around Jesus, and the movement includes the twelve and the women and the crowds. The kingdom is not an idea; it is a following. The chapter that follows will show the kingdom teaching itself to this following in the form of stories that don't resolve, and the reader should understand the parables as addressed to the people who have already answered the summons.

Stories That Don't Resolve

The kingdom was not taught as a set of propositions, as a creed to be recited or a code of rules to be followed. Jesus taught the kingdom in stories — parables — and the parables are the form of the teaching that the reader most likely knows in their Christianised versions. The reader who comes to this chapter with a memory of church Sunday-school lessons about the parables — the sower is about hearing the word, the mustard seed is about small beginnings, the lost son is about repentance and forgiveness — should not leave with those versions intact. The chapter's job is to give the reader the parables as they are in the Gospels, as stories that unsettle and refuse to resolve, and to let the reader hear what Jesus was doing when he told them.

The parables are public and the explanation is private, and this is one of the most important things about them. Mark writes that Jesus told the crowds in parables, and that when he was alone with the disciples he explained everything. The parables are given to the public in their public form; the deeper meaning is given to the inner circle in private. The reader should understand that the parables are not coded messages to be cracked by the clever; they are stories told to the crowds, and the ones who are inside the movement get the explanation, while the ones who are outside hear the story and either understand it or do not. The parables are a way of teaching the kingdom that keeps the secret from those who are outside and opens it to those who are inside. The reader should hear this and understand that the parables are not simply beautiful stories; they are stories that divide the listener, and the division is part of the point.

Mark 4 is the earliest cluster of parables in the Gospels, and it gives the reader the shape of the teaching. The sower goes out to sow, and the seed falls on the path and is eaten by birds, on the rocky ground and springs up and withers, on the thorny ground and is choked, and on the good ground and bears fruit — thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold. The parable is not about sowing method, and the reader should not hear it as a lesson about how to sow better. The parable is about the word of the kingdom going out into the world and landing in different ground. The word fails on the path, where

it is taken away; it springs up and withers on the rocky ground, where the listener has no endurance; it is choked on the thorny ground, where the cares of the world choke it; and it bears fruit on the good ground. The parable unsettles because it acknowledges that the word of the kingdom does not succeed everywhere — that there is ground where it fails, and that the failure is part of the story. The reader who hears the parable is asked to decide what ground they are, and that decision is the point.

Matthew gives the parable in the fuller form, and adds the explanation in private — the sower is the one who sows the word, the path is the one who hears and the evil one takes it away, the rocky ground is the one who hears and receives with joy but has no root and falls away, the thorny ground is the one who hears and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke it, and the good ground is the one who hears and understands and bears fruit. The reader should understand that Matthew's explanation is the private interpretation — the parable told to the crowds, the explanation given to the disciples. The reader should hear the parable and the explanation as two layers, and should not reduce the parable to the explanation. The parable is the story; the explanation is the private meaning. The reader should hear both and decide.

The parable of the weeds is the parable that teaches the mixed present and the future sorting. A man sows good seed in his field, and an enemy sows weeds among the wheat, and the householder says to let both grow together until the harvest, when the reapers will gather the weeds and burn them and the wheat will be gathered into the barn. The parable unsettles because the enemy is in the field and the householder does not pull the weeds out now — he waits until the harvest. The kingdom now contains both the good and the bad, and the separation comes at the end. The reader should hear the parable and understand that the kingdom is not a pure present kingdom of only the good; it is a mixed present in which good and bad grow together, and the judgment comes at the end. Matthew explains the parable privately — the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom, the weeds are the sons of the evil one, the enemy is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, the reapers are the angels. The reader should hear the explanation and the parable and understand the teaching: the kingdom is mixed now, and the end will sort it.

The parable of the yeast is the parable that teaches the kingdom's quiet working. The kingdom is like yeast that a woman mixes into the dough until the whole batch is leavened. The parable unsettles because the kingdom is not a dramatic arrival; it is a quiet transformation from within, invisible at first, until the whole is changed. The reader who expects the kingdom to be a spectacle is unsettled by the yeast. The reader should hear the parable and understand the kingdom as a quiet, hidden power that works from within and transforms the whole. The parable refuses to make the kingdom dramatic, and the reader should understand that the kingdom's power is in its quiet working, not in its visible display.

The parable of the mustard seed is the parable that teaches growth. The kingdom is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, that grows into a tree large enough for the birds to nest in. The parable unsettles because the kingdom starts small and grows large, and the birds nesting in the branches are a detail that is ambiguous. Some interpreters hear the birds as a positive image — the shelter the kingdom provides, the place where the marginal find a home. Other interpreters hear the birds as a negative image — in Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4, the great tree and the birds in its branches are images of empire and the nations nesting in it, and the birds are a sign of the tree's pride. The reader should hear the parable and not impose one interpretation. The parable is a story about growth, and the birds

are part of the story, and the reader should hear the ambiguity. The kingdom starts small and grows large, and the reader should hear the parable as a story about growth without deciding whether the birds are a comfort or a warning.

The parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl are parables that teach the cost of the kingdom. The kingdom is like treasure hidden in a field, and like a pearl of great value. The man who finds the treasure sells all he has to buy the field. The merchant who finds the pearl sells all he has to buy it. The parables unsettle because the kingdom requires everything — total commitment. The reader should hear the parables not as lessons about how to get the kingdom but as stories about the kind of commitment the kingdom demands. The kingdom is worth everything, and the cost is everything. The reader should hear the parables and understand that the kingdom is not a bargain; it is a total reorganisation of a life.

The parable of the net is the parable that repeats the mixed-present, future-sorting pattern of the weeds. The kingdom is like a net that gathers fish of every kind, and at the end the good are kept and the bad are thrown away. The reader should hear the parable and understand that the kingdom is mixed now and sorted at the end. The net gathers all kinds, and the end sorts them. The reader should hear the parable and understand the teaching without needing to reduce it to one image.

The parable of the wedding feast is the parable that teaches the invitation, the refusal, and the judgment. A king prepares a wedding feast for his son. The invited guests refuse to come — one goes to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seize and kill the servants. The king sends his troops to destroy the murderers and burn their city, and then sends the servants to bring in whoever they find — the poor, the crippled, the blind — and the feast goes on. The reader should hear the parable and understand the shape: the invited refuse, the marginal are brought in, and the feast is not a pure gathering — it includes the improperly dressed. One guest is thrown out for not wearing a wedding robe. The reader should hear the parable and understand the complexity: the kingdom includes the marginal, but it is not unconditioned; the kingdom is inclusive, but it requires the wedding robe. The reader who hears the parable is asked to decide whether they are the invited who refuse or the ones brought in from the roads, and whether they are wearing the wedding robe.

Luke's parables of the lost are the parables that teach the joy of recovery, and the elder brother in the prodigal son parable is the figure the reader should hear most carefully. Luke gives the parable of the lost sheep — the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one — and the parable of the lost coin — the woman searches the house for the lost coin and rejoices when she finds it — and the parable of the prodigal son — the father runs to meet the returning son and throws a feast, and the elder brother refuses to go in. The parables unsettle because they present the recovery of the lost as a joyful event, and the elder brother is the one who refuses the joy. The reader who identifies with the elder brother — the one who has stayed, who has done the right thing, who resents the celebration of the one who wasted everything — is the reader the parable is aimed at. The reader should hear the parable and understand that the kingdom's joy is in the recovery of the lost, and that the one who refuses the joy is the one who thinks the kingdom is about their own obedience rather than about the recovery of the lost. The reader should hear the parable and decide whether they are the elder brother or the one who rejoices.

The reader should also understand that the parables are not moral lessons in the modern sense. The reader who comes to the parables expecting a clean moral lesson will be disappointed, because the

parables refuse to hand the reader a tidy answer. The sower does not explain what the reader should do; the reader must decide what ground they are. The weeds does not explain what the reader should do; the reader must decide what to do with the mixed present. The mustard seed does not explain what the reader should do; the reader must decide what to make of the birds. The wedding feast does not explain what the reader should do; the reader must decide whether they are the invited who refuse or the ones brought in. The prodigal son does not explain what the reader should do; the reader must decide whether they are the elder brother or the father. The parables are tools of decision, and the reader should understand them as such. The kingdom is not a lesson; it is a decision.

The reader should also understand that the parables are not an esoteric code to be cracked. The parables are stories told to the crowds; the explanation is given to the disciples in private. The reader should not treat the parables as puzzles with a single hidden answer. The parables are stories that unsettle the listener into decision. The reader who hears the sower and decides they are the good ground is hearing the parable correctly, but the parable does not stop there — the parable is also a story about the word failing on the path and the rocky ground and the thorny ground, and the reader is asked to hear that failure as part of the story. The reader should hear the parable in its full form and not reduce it to one point.

The parables are the kingdom taught in a form that unsettles. The reader should leave this chapter with the understanding that the parables are not Christian lessons with clean morals; they are stories that refuse to resolve, and the refusal is the point. The kingdom is taught in stories that ask the reader to decide, and the reader who decides is the one who has answered the summons. The chapter that follows will turn to the kingdom acting in the world of the healings and the exorcisms — the kingdom not only taught in stories, but enacted in the world of illness and social death.

The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms in this next chapter as the kingdom acting in the world, and should understand the act of healing as the kingdom breaking in. The chapter that follows is the chapter that should show the reader what the kingdom looks like when it moves into the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast, and the reader should understand the touch of Jesus as the kingdom touching the untouchable.

Touching the Untouchable

The kingdom was not only proclaimed and taught; it was enacted. The reader has seen the kingdom announced in the proclamation of chapter 11, the following that answered the summons in chapter 12, and the parables that taught the kingdom in stories that don't resolve in chapter 13. This chapter turns to the kingdom acting in the world — in the healings and the exorcisms. The reader should understand these not as magic tricks or as proofs of divinity, but as the kingdom breaking into the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast, and restoring the people whom the world had removed from the community.

The world of Jesus was a world in which illness removed a person from the community. A leper was unclean and had to stay at a distance, crying out "unclean, unclean," and no one was to come near. A person with an unclean spirit — a person who was possessed, in the language of the tradition — was excluded, pushed to the margins, to the tombs and the wilderness. A paralytic was dependent on

others to carry them, unable to move themselves, dependent on the mercy of the crowd. The sick were dependent and diminished, and the marginal were the ones the reader should understand the healings to be about. The kingdom acted in the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast, and the act of the kingdom was to restore the person to the community.

The reader should understand the exorcisms in the same frame. A person with an unclean spirit was a person who had been overrun by something outside themselves — something that spoke in a voice not their own, that threw them into convulsions, that cut them, that put them among the tombs. The exorcism was the kingdom's act of restoring the person to themselves, to their right mind, to the community. The exorcism was not a performance; it was the kingdom breaking the power of the unclean spirit. The reader should understand the exorcisms as the kingdom's authority over the unclean spirits, and as the kingdom restoring the person who had been overrun.

The first public exorcism in Mark is the one in the synagogue at Capernaum. Jesus has entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and is teaching, and the people are astonished at his teaching, because he teaches them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. And just then — in the middle of the teaching, in the midst of the synagogue — there is a man with an unclean spirit, and the spirit cries out. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God." The spirit knows who Jesus is. Jesus rebukes it, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him," and the unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice, comes out of him. And the people are all amazed, and they keep on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

The reader should understand the exorcism as the kingdom's authority breaking into the synagogue, in the middle of the teaching, in front of the whole community. The unclean spirit knows who Jesus is, and Jesus silences it and commands it out. The reader should understand that the exorcism is the kingdom's act of restoring the man to the community, to his right mind, to the synagogue. The reader should also understand that the unclean spirit's recognition of Jesus as the Holy One of God is the kingdom's identity being known by the unclean spirits — the very things that are opposed to the kingdom recognise the kingdom's agent. Jesus rebukes the spirit and would not allow it to speak, because he knew who they were. The reader should understand the silence as the kingdom not letting the unclean spirits speak — the kingdom's identity is not announced by the spirits that oppose it.

The healing of the leper is the act that shows the kingdom touching the untouchable. A leper comes to Jesus, begging him, and says, "If you choose, you can make me clean." And Jesus, moved with pity, stretches out his hand and touches him, and says, "I do choose. Be made clean," and immediately the leprosy leaves him, and he is made clean. The reader should understand the touch as the act of healing, and as the act that breaks the purity law. The leper is supposed to be at a distance; Jesus touches him. The touch is the kingdom's act of restoring the leper to the community, and the touch is the thing that breaks the boundary. The reader should understand that the healing is not only the word — "I do choose. Be made clean" — but the touch that goes with it. The touch is the sign of the kingdom's power to heal the untouchable.

The reader should also understand that the healed leper is told to show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded for the cleansing. The instruction is to go to the priest and be verified as clean, and the sacrifice is the offering for the cleansing. The reader should understand this as the kingdom's act of restoring the leper to the community in the terms of the community — the

leper is made clean, and the cleansing is to be verified by the priest, and the offering is to be made. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom restoring the leper to the community in the terms of the community, not as a rejection of the community's rules. The kingdom acts within the world of the community, even when it breaks the boundary.

The leper disobeys and begins to proclaim the cleansing widely, and Jesus can no longer publicly enter a town, but stays outside in the solitary places. The reader should understand the cost of the healing — the leper's disobedience makes the healing public, and the publicity crowds Jesus out of the towns. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom acting, and the act as having a cost. The reader should not hear the leper's disobedience as a failure; the reader should hear it as the human response to the kingdom's act, and as the thing that crowds Jesus out of the towns. The healing is a public act because the leper makes it public, and the publicity is the cost of the healing.

The healing of the paralytic in Capernaum is the act that pairs the forgiveness and the healing. Jesus returns to Capernaum and is at home, and many are gathered together, so that there is no room, not even in front of the door. And Jesus is preaching the word to them. And they come bringing a man who is paralysed, carried by four men. And when they cannot bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they remove the roof above him, and make an opening, and let down the mat on which the paralysed man lies. And when Jesus sees their faith, he says to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." And the scribes are there in the house, and they are reasoning in their hearts — "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" — and Jesus knows their reasoning and says to them, "Which is easier, to say to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven'? Or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?" And Jesus says to the man, "I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home." And the man rises at once and takes up the bed and goes out before them all. And they are all amazed and glorify God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

The reader should understand the healing as the sign that the forgiveness is real. Jesus says the man's sins are forgiven, and the scribes object that only God can forgive sins. Jesus answers with the question — which is easier, to say "your sins are forgiven," or to say "rise and walk"? — and then heals the man, so that the forgiveness is made visible in the healing. The reader should understand the healing as the sign of the kingdom's authority to forgive sins, and as the sign that the kingdom's forgiveness is real. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom acting in the world, and as the act that restores the paralytic to the community — the paralytic is healed and can walk home, and the crowd is amazed.

The reader should also understand the friends who bring the paralytic. The four men carry the paralytic, and when they cannot bring him through the crowd, they remove the roof and let him down through the opening. The reader should understand the faith of the friends as the thing Jesus sees — "when Jesus saw their faith" — and the reader should understand the act of the friends as the act of the community that brings the marginal to the kingdom. The reader should understand the roof-digging as the act of determination, the act of removing the obstacle so that the marginal can be brought to Jesus. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom acting on the faith of the community, and as the act that restores the paralytic to the community.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the act that shows the kingdom in the domestic setting. Jesus leaves the synagogue and goes into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John, and the mother of Simon's wife is ill with a fever, and they tell Jesus about her, and Jesus comes and takes

her by the hand and lifts her up, and the fever leaves her, and she begins to serve them. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom acting in the house, in the domestic setting, in the presence of the family. The reader should understand the touch as the act of healing, and the healing as the thing that restores the woman to the household, to the serving of the household. The reader should understand the healing as the kingdom acting in the small, personal scale, and as the act that restores the woman to the household.

The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms together as the kingdom acting in the world. The healings are the kingdom restoring the sick to the community, the exorcisms are the kingdom restoring the possessed to themselves and to the community. The touch is the act of the kingdom's power, and the healing is the thing that demonstrates the kingdom's power. The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms as signs of the kingdom, and as the kingdom acting in the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast.

The reader should also understand the exorcisms in the context of the first-century world. A person with an unclean spirit was a person who had been overrun by something outside themselves — something that spoke in a voice not their own, that threw them into convulsions, that cut them, that put them among the tombs. The exorcism was the kingdom's act of restoring the person to themselves, to their right mind, to the community. The exorcism was the kingdom breaking the power of the unclean spirit. The reader should understand the exorcisms as the kingdom's authority over the unclean spirits, and as the kingdom restoring the person who had been overrun.

The Gerasene demoniac is the most dramatic exorcism in Mark, and the reader should understand it as the kingdom acting in the world of the margin. The man lives among the tombs, self-harming, unbindable — no one can bind him, not with chains, not with fetters, and he is always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he sees Jesus from afar, he runs and worships him, and cries out with a loud voice. "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." And Jesus asks him, "What is your name?" And he replies, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And the man begs Jesus not to send the unclean spirits out of the country. And there is a large herd of pigs feeding on the mountain, and the spirits beg to be sent into the pigs, and Jesus gives them permission, and the unclean spirits come out and enter the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushes down the steep bank into the sea and is drowned. And the man is restored — clothed, in his right mind.

The reader should understand the exorcism as the kingdom's power over the unclean spirits, and as the kingdom restoring the man to himself and to the community. The spirits are Legion — many, a Roman word for a unit of soldiers, the power of the empire. The reader should understand the exorcism as the kingdom breaking the power of the unclean spirits, and as the kingdom restoring the man who had been overrun. The reader should understand the pigs as the thing that the spirits enter instead of the man, and the drowning of the pigs as the cost of the exorcism — the destruction of the pigs. The reader should understand the exorcism as the kingdom acting, and as the act that destroys the pigs and restores the man.

The reader should also understand the man's request that the spirits not be sent out of the country. The man with the Legion begs Jesus not to send them out of the country — the spirits want to stay in the country, in the pigs. The reader should understand the request as the thing that the spirits want — to stay in the country, in the pigs, rather than to be sent away. The reader should understand the

exorcism as the kingdom's act of sending the spirits out of the man and into the pigs, and the drowning of the pigs as the cost of the exorcism. The reader should not hear the exorcism as a simple victory; the reader should hear it as the kingdom acting, and as the act that destroys the pigs and restores the man.

The reader should understand the demons' recognition of Jesus as the Son of God, the Holy One of God, the Son of the Most High God. The demons recognise who Jesus is, and Jesus rebukes them and would not allow them to speak. The reader should understand the recognition as the kingdom's identity being known by the unclean spirits — the very things that are opposed to the kingdom recognise the kingdom's agent. The reader should understand the silence as the kingdom not letting the unclean spirits speak — the kingdom's identity is not announced by the spirits that oppose it. The reader should understand the silence as the kingdom's act of not letting the demons announce the kingdom's identity.

The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms as the kingdom acting in the world, and as the kingdom breaking in and restoring the marginal to the community. The reader should understand the touch as the act of the kingdom's power, and the healing as the thing that demonstrates the kingdom's power. The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms as signs of the kingdom, and as the kingdom acting in the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast. The reader should understand the exorcisms as the kingdom's authority over the unclean spirits, and as the kingdom restoring the person who had been overrun. The reader should understand the demons' recognition as the kingdom's identity being known by the unclean spirits, and the silence as the kingdom not letting the demons speak.

The reader should leave this chapter with the understanding that the healings and exorcisms are the kingdom acting in the world. The healings are the kingdom restoring the sick to the community — the leper is made clean and touched, the paralytic is forgiven and healed and walks home, the mother-in-law is healed and serves the household. The exorcisms are the kingdom restoring the possessed to themselves and to the community — the man in the synagogue is restored, the Gerasene demoniac is restored. The touch is the act of the kingdom's power, and the healing is the thing that demonstrates the kingdom's power. The reader should understand the healings and exorcisms as the kingdom acting in the world of the sick and the possessed and the outcast. The chapter that follows will turn to the kingdom acting in the world of the table — the eating with the marginal, the table as the sign of the kingdom.

Table Manners

The kingdom was not only proclaimed (chapter 11), and not only followed (chapter 12), and not only taught in stories that don't resolve (chapter 13), and not only enacted in healings and exorcisms (chapter 14). The kingdom was also eaten. This chapter turns to the table, the shared meal, the eating with the wrong people — because the brief says plainly that this is where the kingdom's central provocation sits, and because the reader who has followed the story this far needs to see that the kingdom was a social claim as much as a spiritual one. The kingdom announced itself at the table, and the table is where the argument with the authorities became unavoidable.

The reader should understand the table as a real social fact in the world Jesus lived in, not as a polite symbol. Eating in a peasant economy was a public act, and who ate with whom was a claim about who belonged, who was trusted, who was clean, and what the world should look like. In a society organised around purity and hierarchy, a table that received everyone was a quiet argument about what the world should be. The conflicts over eating are not about manners. They are about the shape of the kingdom.

The specific scene the Gospels give us is Mark 2, the meal at the house of Levi — Matthew — after he has been called. Jesus is sitting at the table in Levi's house, and many tax collectors and sinners are eating with him and his disciples, because there are many who follow him. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees see this and ask the disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The question is not about the food. It is about the company. The objection is to the act of sitting at the same table as people who are understood to be on the wrong side of the boundary.

The reader should understand who the people at that table are. Tax collectors — publicani — are the people who collect the Roman taxes in the region, people who work for the empire's system of extraction and who are understood to be collaborators. They are on the wrong side of the purity question because their work brings them into contact with Gentiles, with Roman money, with systems that a careful Jew would avoid. Sinners is a broader term — the people who are seen as publicly failing to keep the law, the people who do not have the reputation for careful observance. The overlap between the two categories is real: the tax collector is often understood as a sinner precisely because of his work. The combination is not accidental. The table at Levi's house is filled with people who are, in the social language of the time, the wrong people.

The question the Pharisees ask — "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" — is the right question to ask, and the honest reader should not be surprised by it. The reader should understand that the objection is a serious objection, and that the serious objection is the point. If Jesus were eating with Pharisees, careful observers of Torah, there would be no story. The story exists because of who is at the table. The table is the provocation. The kingdom is the argument about who belongs.

Jesus' answer in Mark is indirect — he does not answer the question directly but is reported to have said, in Matthew's version, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." And he adds, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." The reader should understand this answer as a claim about the direction of the kingdom's work. The kingdom is not coming to the people who think they are already well. It is coming to the people who know they are not. The doctor image is a claim about the purpose of the ministry: the table is where the sick are met, and the sick are the people who are not already confident in their standing.

The reader should also understand what this answer does and does not do. It does not say that the people at the table are "really" sick and the people asking the question are "really" healthy. It does not turn the Pharisees, the people asking the question, into the punchline of a parable about self-righteousness. That would be the easy reading, and it would be the anti-Jewish reading. The chapter should not do that. The answer is a claim about the direction of the ministry — the kingdom is coming to the marginal, the people on the wrong side of the boundary — and the reader should hear it as such, not as a self-congratulatory reversal where the askers are revealed as the real sinners. The kingdom is not a trick in which the people who ask the question are the people who fail it. The

kingdom is a different set of priorities, and the table is the place where those priorities are made visible.

The fasting question follows in the same chapter of Mark, and it belongs to the same cluster of table disputes. John's disciples and the Pharisees are fasting, and people come and ask Jesus why his disciples are not. The question is about the visible rhythm of the religious life: why does this teacher's following not do what the others do? Why do they not fast? Jesus' answer uses the image of the bridegroom. How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot. But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast.

The reader should understand the fasting question as a disagreement about timing and practice, and as a claim about the present moment. The argument is not that fasting is wrong, or that the old ways are rejected. The claim is that the present moment — the presence of Jesus, the presence of the kingdom — is a moment that has its own rhythm, and that rhythm does not include the current fast. The future fast is named: when the bridegroom is taken away. The reader should hear that forward-reference as part of the shape of the chapter — the kingdom's table has a limited time, and the book is heading toward the moment it ends. The fasting dispute is the disagreement about what kind of religious life this is, and Jesus' answer is that it is a wedding-feast kind of religious life, for now.

The reader should also understand what the fasting question is not. It is not an attack on John the Baptist or on John's disciples. John has been arrested — chapter 10 said so. John's movement continues, and John's disciples continue their practice. The disagreement between the two movements about fasting is a disagreement within the larger family of movements, the kind of disagreement that happens when a new teacher appears with a new claim about where God is acting. The chapter should not treat it as a personal attack or a schism. It is a different answer to the question of what a person should do while waiting for God.

The Sabbath disputes are the third cluster of table-related arguments in the early part of Mark, and they belong to the same theme: the kingdom breaks into the existing order of things, and the existing order objects. The grain-plucking on the Sabbath — the disciples walking through the fields and picking heads of grain as they go — produces the objection: why are they breaking the Sabbath? Jesus' answer appeals to a precedent from the Torah: David and his men, when they were hungry, ate the consecrated bread in the house of God, though it was not lawful for anyone but the priests. The argument is an intra-Jewish argument about how the Torah is read. Both sides are working within the Jewish tradition. The Pharisees are saying: the Torah says what it says about the Sabbath, and this breaks it. Jesus is saying: the Torah also has a story in it about exceptions, about feeding the hungry over against the rules, and that story matters too.

The reader should understand this as the kind of argument the Pharisees and Jesus are having all through the Gospels: not a fight between people who care about the Torah and people who do not, but a fight between people who both care about the Torah and read it differently. The chapter should not slide into the easy pattern of Pharisees as legalistic anti-God villains and Jesus as the one who frees people from the law. The chapter should present the dispute as a real dispute between people in the same Jewish world, disagreeing about the meaning of the same texts, disagreeing about what God wants, disagreeing about how the kingdom should be lived. That is the honest reading, and it is the only reading that fits the sources.

Mark gives us another Sabbath scene, the man with the withered hand in the synagogue. Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and a man with a withered hand is there. The Pharisees are watching — they are waiting to see what Jesus will do. Jesus asks the question himself: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath — to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" The question is a question about the shape of the Sabbath: is the Sabbath a rule that is kept by doing nothing, or is the Sabbath a day on which the good is done? Then Jesus heals the man. The reader should understand the healing as the answer to the question, and the healing as the provocation. Jesus will not let the Sabbath be a day on which good is withheld. The good is done. The hand is restored.

Mark gives us a detail that the other Synoptics do not: Jesus looks around at the Pharisees in anger, and he is grieved by the hardness of their hearts. The anger is a real thing in the text, and the reader should not smooth it away. The chapter should include the anger, and should include the grief. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is not a polite disagreement. It is an argument that matters, and the anger is part of what matters. The reader should understand that the kingdom's table — the eating with the wrong people, the healing on the Sabbath, the claim about the present moment — is something Jesus is angry about, and something he is grieved by the refusal to receive.

The political consequence in Mark is immediate: the Pharisees go out and begin to plot with the Herodians how they might destroy Jesus. The chapter should note this: the table disputes have a political consequence. The Herodians are the supporters of Herod — the same Herod Antipas whose building boom the reader encountered in chapter 5, the same Herod who killed John the Baptist in chapter 7. The Pharisees and the Herodians do not usually agree with each other. The fact that they begin to plot together against Jesus is itself a sign of how dangerous the kingdom's table is understood to be. The chapter should make this explicit: the table is not a private spiritual practice. It is a claim about the world, and the world responds by plotting.

Luke has a different Sabbath table scene, the healing at the house of the leading Pharisee. Jesus is a guest at the table of one of the people who object to him, and a man with abnormal swelling is there. Jesus asks the experts in the law and the Pharisees whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, and they remain silent. Then Jesus takes hold of the man, heals him, and sends him away. And he asks them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" The reader should understand this scene for what it is: Jesus at the table of his opponents, doing the thing they object to, and answering their silence with a question about compassion that does not let them off the hook. The argument is not abstract. It is about whether a person in need is the kind of thing you help on the Sabbath. The chapter should present the scene as a specific and vivid argument, not a general principle.

Luke gives us the framing that ties the table directly to the lost parables in chapter 15 of his Gospel. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" The muttering is the social fact behind the parables. The lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son follow directly as the kingdom's answer to the muttering: the kingdom is the thing that goes looking for the lost, and the table is the place where the lost are found. The reader who has come this far should understand the table as the scene that produces the parables — the muttering about the table is the reason Jesus tells the stories about the lost.

The chapter should close by naming the shape of the dispute, and by handing off to the next chapter, which is the fights proper — the arguments with the Pharisees, the specific charges, the escalations, the way the dispute about the table turns into the dispute about blasphemy and about the source of Jesus' power. The table is not the end of the conflicts. It is the beginning of them. The chapter that follows will take up the fights themselves.

The reader should leave this chapter with three things. First, the table is a real provocation, and the provocation is public — the eating with the wrong people is the thing people see and object to. Second, the objections are real and should not be dismissed; the Pharisees are making a serious argument about the shape of Israel's life, and the chapter should treat it as such. Third, the table is where the kingdom's claim about who belongs becomes visible, and the claim is that the marginal, the tax collector, the sinner, the outsider, is the person the kingdom is for. The chapter does not resolve the dispute. It presents it, and it names what is at stake: a different set of priorities about who matters, argued over a shared meal.

Fights

The kingdom at the table produced a fight. The healings produced a fight. The Sabbath produced a fight. The charge that the exorcisms were the work of the demonic produced a fight. This chapter turns to the arguments themselves — the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees — and it does so for one reason above all others: the reader who has followed the story this far has probably been handed a version of these fights in which the Pharisees are the villains and Jesus is the hero, and the chapter needs to replace that version with the honest one.

The reader should understand where these fights happen. They happen in and around Capernaum, the fishing village on the lake where Jesus has made his base. They happen in the house of Peter — the house the reader encountered in chapter 10, the house where the crowds gather at the door and where the paralytic is lowered through the roof — and in the synagogue of the village, and as Jesus moves from village to village through Galilee. The fights are not abstractions. They happen in real places, in front of real people, in the course of a public ministry that is drawing crowds and drawing attention. The reader should feel the setting: the house crowded to the door, the synagogue full on the Sabbath, the villages where news of what Jesus is doing has already travelled. The fights are public, and they become public in a place the reader has already met.

The honest version is this: the arguments are intra-Jewish debates between people who cared about the same things. The Pharisees and Jesus are both Jews, both concerned with Torah, both concerned with the relationship between Israel and God, both committed to the life of the people. They disagree, sometimes sharply, about how that life should be lived, about the boundaries of purity, about the Sabbath, about fasting, about who Jesus is, about the source of his authority. The disagreement is real. It is not a disagreement between people who care about God and people who do not. Neither side is a villain in a morality play. The reader should understand the fights as the arguments of a family, not as the fight between good and evil.

The argument that produces the most famous list of charges is the one about the exorcisms. In Mark 3, the scribes who have come down from Jerusalem say that Jesus has Beelzebul and that by the

prince of demons he casts out demons. The reader should understand what is happening here. The Jerusalem scribes represent the central religious authority. The exorcisms are visible, public, and numerous. People are being restored. The scribes cannot simply say the exorcisms did not happen — people have seen them. So they give a different explanation: the power behind the exorcisms is not God but the ruler of the demons. The argument is a theological argument about the source of the kingdom's power, and it escalates quickly because it cuts to the heart of who Jesus is.

The reader should understand the logic of the charge. Beelzebul is a name for the ruler of the demons. The scribes are not saying Jesus is nothing. They are saying that what he is doing — the exorcisms, the restoration of the possessed — is the work of the ruler of the demons, acting through Jesus. This is not a dismissal. It is an explanation that accepts the reality of the exorcisms and denies the source. The reader should understand that the scribes are trying to answer the question: what is happening here, and who is it that is happening through? Their answer is: this is the work of the ruler of the demons. Jesus' answer is that this cannot be, because the ruler of the demons would not cast out the ruler of the demons.

Jesus' response in Mark 3 is a series of arguments. How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. Then the positive claim: by the finger of God — or the Spirit of God, in Matthew's version — Jesus casts out demons, and if that is so, the kingdom of God has come upon them. The reader should understand this argument as the kingdom's claim to be God's own act, not a rival spiritual power. The charge is that the exorcisms are demonic; the response is that they are the act of God breaking into the world. The reader should hear the argument and understand that it is a real argument about what is happening in the exorcisms, not a plot device.

The reader should also understand the seriousness of the reply. "Whoever is not with me is against me" — the saying that follows — is a hardening. The kingdom's claim is not a neutral offer; it is a claim that makes a division. The reader who has followed the book this far should understand that the kingdom makes a claim on its hearers, and that the claim is the thing that produces the division. The argument is not a dispute about interpretation in the abstract; it is a dispute about what is actually happening, and what is happening is that the kingdom is breaking into the world, and some people recognise it and some people charge that it is demonic. The reader should understand that the fight is a fight about the kingdom's identity, and that the kingdom's identity is the thing that cannot be neutral.

The chapter should name the hard saying that follows in Mark's account: the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. The reader should understand what this is and what it is not. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the charge that the Spirit's work is the work of the demons — the refusal to recognise the kingdom's own source. It is not a one-time utterance, and it is not a slip of the tongue that sends a person to perdition. The reader should understand it as the hardening that makes the fight what it is: the refusal to recognise the kingdom when it is in front of you, the attribution of God's own act to the enemy of God. The chapter should present this without panic, and without making it a doctrine of who is and is not saved. The reader should hear it as the shape of the fight at its sharpest point.

The Sabbath disputes are a different kind of argument, and they belong to the same chapter of Mark. The grain-plucking incident, the healing of the man with the withered hand — these are arguments about the Sabbath. The reader should understand the argument. The Pharisees hold to a careful reading of the Sabbath law. Jesus holds that the Sabbath is a day for doing good, and that the good — the feeding of the hungry, the healing of the sick — is the Sabbath's true work. The reader who has come this far should already understand that this is not a fight between people who care about the Torah and people who do not. Both sides are working within the Jewish tradition. The Pharisees are arguing from the Torah's own text about what the Sabbath requires. Jesus is arguing from the Torah's own text — the story of David and the showbread, the argument about whether the Sabbath is for doing good — for what the Sabbath requires. The fight is an intra-Jewish fight about the shape of the Torah's demands.

The reader should understand the grain-plucking incident in its setting. The disciples are walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and they begin to pluck the heads of grain. The Pharisees object: why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Jesus answers with a precedent: David, when he was hungry, and those who were with him, entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the consecrated bread, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he also gave it to those who were with him. Jesus then gives the conclusion: the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The reader should understand the argument as a claim about the direction of the law. The Sabbath is a gift to the person, not a burden that swallows the person. The reader should understand that this is an argument within the Torah's own framework — the counter-example from David — and not a rejection of the Torah. The chapter should make this explicit, because the reader who is carrying the later caricature will assume that Jesus is freeing people from the law, when in fact he is arguing for a particular reading of the law.

The healing of the man with the withered hand in the synagogue is the second Sabbath argument in Mark's order, and it is the one that produces the conspiracy. Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and a man with a withered hand is there. The Pharisees are watching — they are waiting to see what Jesus will do. Jesus asks the question himself: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath — to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" The question is a question about the shape of the Sabbath. Then Jesus heals the man. The reader should understand the healing as the answer to the question, and the healing as the provocation. Jesus will not let the Sabbath be a day on which good is withheld. The good is done. The hand is restored.

Mark gives us a detail that the other Synoptics do not: Jesus looks around at the Pharisees in anger, and he is grieved by the hardness of their hearts. The anger is a real thing in the text, and the reader should not smooth it away. The chapter should include the anger, and should include the grief. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is not a polite disagreement. It is an argument that matters, and the anger is part of what matters. The reader should understand that the kingdom's table — the eating with the wrong people, the healing on the Sabbath, the claim about the present moment — is something Jesus is angry about, and something he is grieved by the refusal to receive.

The political dimension of the Sabbath fight is the detail that belongs to this chapter and to the escalation of the fights. Mark gives us, after the healing of the man with the withered hand, the detail that the Pharisees go out and begin to plot with the Herodians how they might destroy Jesus. The reader should understand this as a political escalation. The Herodians are the supporters of Herod

Antipas — the same Herod whose building boom the reader encountered in chapter 5, whose capital at Sepphoris is four miles from Nazareth, whose steward's wife Joanna is one of the women funding the movement in chapter 12. The Pharisees and the Herodians are not natural allies. The fact that they begin to plot together is a sign that the argument has become a threat perceived by both groups. The chapter should make this explicit: the fight about the Sabbath is not a theological dispute that stays in the synagogue. It is a dispute that produces a conspiracy.

The reader should understand the fight's shape more broadly. The Gospels record a pattern of disputes: the question about the authority by which Jesus does these things; the question about fasting; the question about the Sabbath; the question about the tariffs and the coins — "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"; the question about the resurrection, in Matthew 22 and Mark 12, the Sadducees asking Jesus about the woman who had seven husbands; the question about the greatest commandment. These are not drunken quarrels. They are the standard form of public religious debate in a Jewish world, the kind of argument that happens when a teacher appears with a claim to authority. The reader should understand the fights as the natural form of the argument between Jesus and the established religious authorities, and as a form of argument the reader can recognise as Jewish and as intellectual.

The chapter should name the reader's default version of these fights and repair it. The reader who has grown up in the Christian tradition has probably absorbed the picture of the Pharisees as hypocrites, as legalistic oppressors, as the people Jesus condemns in the woes of Matthew 23. The chapter should say plainly that this picture is a later Christian picture, and that it does not fit the historical argument. The Pharisees are a real Jewish movement, concerned with Torah, with purity, with the daily keeping of the law, with the hope for Israel's life. They are not the caricature. The reader should understand that Jesus' harsh words in Matthew 23, if historical, are the sharp end of a specific argument — not a general condemnation of an entire group, and not a licence for the later Christian tradition to turn the Pharisees into stand-ins for every enemy of the gospel.

The chapter should be careful not to swing the other way either. The reader should not be given the opposite caricature: the Pharisees as sympathetic misunderstood saints and Jesus as the one who wrongly attacks them. The sources give us a genuine and sometimes bitter argument, and the chapter should not flatter either side. The argument is what it is: a real dispute between real people who both cared about God and disagreed about what God wanted. The reader should understand that the argument is the thing the book is trying to convey, and that the honest reading is the reading that lets the argument be an argument.

One passage deserves special handling: the charge that Jesus is a blasphemer. In Mark 2, when Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins, the scribes say in their hearts, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The reader should understand the charge. To forgive sins, in a Jewish frame, is a divine prerogative. The scribes are not being petty. They are making the right theological objection: if Jesus is a human teacher, he cannot forgive sins. The reader should understand that the question "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" is the right question, and that the answer Jesus gives — the healing of the paralytic as the visible sign that the forgiveness is real — is the kingdom's answer to the question. The chapter should present this as a serious theological dispute, not a petty objection. The fight is about whether the kingdom's representative has the authority to forgive sins, and the answer is the act of healing.

The chapter should also name what the fights are not. They are not fights between Christianity and Judaism. The reader should not import the later history of Christian-Jewish conflict into a dispute between a Jewish teacher and other Jews in the 20s or 30s of the first century. The reader should understand that the fights are inside a Jewish world, between people who are all Jews, all committed to the life of Israel, all reading the same Torah, all hoping for the same God's kingdom — and disagreeing, sometimes bitterly, about how that hope should be lived. The chapter should make this explicit every time it is at risk of being swallowed by the later tradition's shape.

The chapter should also name the question of authority that runs through the fights. The scribes and Pharisees are not objecting only to the content of what Jesus says. They are objecting to the claim behind it: the authority to speak and act as if the kingdom is breaking in through him. The reader should understand that the fight is as much about the source of authority as it is about the content of the law. "By what authority are you doing these things?" is the question that underlies many of the disputes, and the reader should hear it as the underlying question. The chapter should name this, because the reader who understands the fight as only about Sabbath or only about table manners will miss the question that runs beneath all of them: who is this, and by what right does he speak and act as he does?

The chapter should close by naming the shape of the disputes and handing off to the next chapter, which is the family problem — the moment when the people who know Jesus best, his mother and his brothers, come to take him home because they think he has lost his mind. The fights with the Pharisees are arguments about the kingdom. The family problem is the cost of the kingdom in the life of the man who proclaimed it. The chapter that follows will sit with that cost, and the reader should carry the fights forward as the context for the family's worry.

The Family Problem

The fights with the Pharisees were public. They were the visible argument about the kingdom. But there is another scene in the Gospels that is harder to face, and it belongs to this chapter. Jesus' mother and his brothers come to get him, because they think he has lost his mind. They come from Nazareth — the village of four hundred the reader has spent two chapters inside — to the place where he is teaching, and they cannot get to him because the crowd is so large. Someone tells him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, looking for you." And Jesus answers, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who are sitting around him, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

The reader should sit with this one. The brief says so plainly, and the chapter has to do the same. The family who knew him best — the people who had watched him grow up, who had eaten at the same table, who had lived through the same thirty years of silence — come to take him home because they think he is unwell. They think he has lost his mind. And he answers by redefining the family around the will of God, and the reader is left to carry the weight of the scene without a resolution.

The reader should understand what Mark 3:21 is reporting. The verb is interesting: they came to seize him, in some versions; the thought is that he is beside himself. The Greek is hard to translate cleanly, but the sense is clear — the family thinks he is out of his mind, or out of control, or in the

grip of something that is not right. The reader should not be sent looking for a clinical diagnosis, and the chapter should not pretend to know what "out of his mind" meant in that household in that moment. The reader should understand that the family's fear is real and the family's concern is real, and that the chapter's job is to present the scene as it is in the sources, not to resolve it.

The chapter should not pretend that the family's fear is the same as the Pharisees' charge. The reader should understand what the family's fear is not. The family's fear is not the scribes' charge that Jesus has Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. The reader should understand the difference. The family is not accusing Jesus of demonic possession. The family is worried about him. The reader who has followed the story this far should understand that the family's fear is the fear of a mother and brothers who have watched their son and brother become a person whose public activity is drawing crowds and arguments and the attention of the authorities, and who now cannot reach him, and who come to take him home because they think he has lost his mind. The reader should not collapse the two fears into one, or turn the family's worry into a version of the religious authorities' charge. The two are different, and the chapter should keep them different.

The chapter should name what the scene tells the reader about Jesus' family. They are not disciples. They are not, at this point, people who have answered the summons. They are the people who love him and are afraid for him, and who come to get him because they cannot bear what is happening. The reader should understand that the family is a family, with love and worry, and that the kingdom's claim has not yet reached them. The reader should not read the scene as a condemnation of the family, or as proof that family love is inferior to the kingdom. The chapter should resist both readings. The scene stands as reported, and the family's fear stands as fear.

Jesus' answer — "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" — is a redefinition of the family. The reader should understand what the redefinition means. The kingdom's family is the family of those who do the will of God, the family of those who have answered the summons. The twelve are part of this family, and the women, and the crowds who hear him. The family of the kingdom is a real family, and it is the family that Jesus is building around himself in the course of his public work. The reader should understand the redefinition as a positive claim — the kingdom is a family, and the family is the people who do the will of God — and not as a rejection of the family he came from. The chapter should not read the redefinition as a misogynist dismissal of mothers or a rejection of natural affection. The reader should hear it as a claim about what the world looks like when the kingdom is breaking in: a new family, around the kingdom's will, in which mother and brother and sister are the people who do that will.

The reader should also understand what the redefinition is not. It is not a statement that the natural family is worthless, or that the natural family is the enemy of the kingdom. The reader should not be given the opposite caricature either: the kingdom as the thing that destroys the family. The chapter should not let the scene be read into that shape. The redefinition is a claim about a new family made by the kingdom, not a denial of the old one. The reader should understand the tension — the old family has come to take Jesus home, the new family is sitting at his feet — and should carry the tension without being told which family wins. The chapter should not resolve it.

The reader should also understand the cost of the redefinition. The natural family comes, and the natural family is not, at that moment, the family of the kingdom. The reader should feel the cost in the scene's plainness: the mother who has come to get her son, the brothers who have come to take

him home, the answer that looks past them to the people sitting at his feet. The reader who has a family should not be asked to cheer at this. The reader should be asked to understand it as a real scene, with a real cost, in which the kingdom's claim has the effect of redefining the closest bonds. The chapter should not flinch from the cost, and should not explain it away. The brief says sit with it, and the chapter sits with it.

The brothers named in Mark 6 — James, Joses, Judas, and Simon — and the unnamed sisters are the family the reader has been carrying since chapter 5, when the chapter named the household of the *tektōn*. The reader should understand that the same family is now, in chapter 17, the family that comes to take Jesus home. The brothers who are named later — James especially, who becomes a figure in the Jerusalem community after Jesus' death — are the same brothers who come in this scene. The reader should hold both facts: the brothers who come to take him home because they think he has lost his mind, and the brother who later becomes a leader in the Jerusalem community. The chapter should not resolve the tension between the two moments. The reader should carry both: the family that thought he had lost his mind, and the brother who later led the community that remembered him.

The reader should also understand that the same family, the same brothers, are named in the list of the twelve in some traditions — James the son of Alphaeus, Judas the son of James — and that the family is part of the wider following, even if the brothers in the scene of chapter 17 are not yet followers. The reader should not press the identification of the brothers named in Mark 6 with the men named in the list of the twelve. The chapter should name the possibility and leave it open. What the reader can say is that the brothers named in Mark 6 are the brothers who come in Mark 3, and that one of them, James, later becomes a figure in the Jerusalem community. The reader should not be given more identification than the sources allow.

The chapter should also name the mother. Mary is present in the scene, and the reader has met her in chapter 5 as the mother of a large family, the household woman who managed a home on wages and margin. The reader should understand that Mary is the same woman, now elderly, now worried, now coming to get her son. The reader should not be given the later portrait of Mary the queen of heaven or the later portrait of Mary the perfect disciple. The reader should meet her here as a mother, afraid for her son. The chapter should not flinch from the mother in the scene.

The reader should also understand that Mary is the woman who has lived through the thirty years of silence, the woman who has watched her son grow up in a *tektōn* household, the woman who has watched him leave Nazareth and make a base at Capernaum, the woman who has watched the crowds gather and the arguments begin. The reader should understand that her fear in this scene is the fear of a woman who has watched her son become someone she cannot control and does not understand. The chapter should not reduce her to a symbol or to the later tradition's Mary. The reader should meet her as a mother.

The reader should also understand what the scene does and does not say about Jesus' own self-understanding. The chapter should not press the scene into a statement about whether Jesus thought he was God or not, or whether he thought he was above the family. The reader should understand that the scene reports a moment in which Jesus, faced with the fear of his family, responds by redefining the family around the will of God. The reader should not use this scene as proof of a high christology

or as proof of a low one. The chapter should leave the scene in its plain form: the family comes, the family is afraid, Jesus answers by pointing to the family of the kingdom.

The reader should also understand the scene in the context of the illness-as-social-death frame from chapter 14. The family's fear that Jesus has lost his mind is a fear that he has become a person who cannot function in the household, in the community, in the family. The reader should understand that the fear is not a clinical diagnosis but a social fear — the fear that the son and brother who has become a public figure, a teacher with crowds and arguments and the attention of the authorities, has fallen outside the bounds of what the family can manage. The chapter should not medicalise the fear, but should understand it in the social framework the reader already carries. The reader should understand the family's fear as the fear of a household in crisis, a family whose son has become a person whose public life has put him beyond the family's reach.

The reader should also understand the scene in the context of the embarrassment principle from chapter 8. The family's fear that Jesus has lost his mind is the kind of story the later tradition would not have invented — the family of the Saviour thinking he is mad. The reader should understand that the story is there, in Mark, and that the embarrassment principle makes it more likely to be close to what happened. The reader should understand that the family's fear is the kind of detail the church would not have invented, and that the chapter should treat it as such. The reader should hear the embarrassment principle at work in the family problem, and should understand that the family's fear is the kind of detail that makes the story what it is.

The reader should also understand the scene in the context of the parables of the lost from chapter 13. The kingdom is the thing that goes looking for the lost, and the family problem is the family that has been lost to the kingdom — the family that has not answered the summons, the family that has come to take him home. The reader should understand the tension: the kingdom is the thing that recovers the lost, and the family is the family that has not been recovered. The reader should carry the tension without being told that the family is recovered later — because the chapter does not know that, and should not pretend to know it. The reader should carry the scene as it is, with the family outside, looking for him, and him inside, pointing to the family of the kingdom.

The chapter should close by sitting with the scene and handing off to the next part of the book. Part Three has taken the reader through the base at Capernaum, the kingdom in plain English, the people who followed, the stories that don't resolve, the healings and exorcisms, the table manners, the fights with the Pharisees, and the family problem. The reader has seen the kingdom proclaimed, followed, taught, enacted, shared, argued over, and paid for in the life of the man who proclaimed it. Part Three ends here, with the family problem, and the reader should carry the whole shape of the part forward: the kingdom is proclaimed, followed, taught, enacted, shared, argued over, and paid for. The chapters that follow will move toward Jerusalem, toward the Passover, toward the demonstration that got him killed, and the reader should carry the family's fear into that road.

The chapter should leave the reader with the scene as it is: the mother and brothers outside, the crowd inside, the answer that redefines the family around the will of God, and the silence that follows. The reader should not be given a resolution. The reader should be given the scene, and the cost, and the understanding that the kingdom makes a claim that runs through the closest bonds. The chapter that follows will move to Part Four, to the question of what Jesus thought he was, to the apocalyptic frame, to the decision to go to Jerusalem, to the city at festival, and to the demonstration.

The reader should carry the family's fear into that road, and should understand that the cost the family paid is the cost the kingdom claims.

Part Four: The Road to Jerusalem

What Did He Think He Was?

The reader who has followed him this far may reasonably expect that by chapter eighteen, the book would have settled the question. We have seen him preaching, gathering followers, healing the sick, arguing with the Pharisees, redefining his family. By now we should know who he thought he was. The honest answer is that we do not, and that the question matters enough to spend a chapter on the shape of our ignorance before we go any further.

The question is hard because the four Gospels were written decades after he died, by people who already knew he mattered and had worked out what to call him. Mark's community called him the Son of God. Matthew's called him the Messiah. John's community had a fully developed theology of what that meant. The historian's job is to read those texts from the inside out, to notice not just what they say about him but what they do with the words they use, and to ask which parts of the accumulated language might predate the Gospels and which belong to the later community. The answer is usually a mixed one, and the chapter will say so plainly.

The question "what did he think he was" is not the same as "what did his followers end up calling him," and it is not the same as "what is the correct theological answer." It is the question of what vocabulary a Jewish man from Galilee, living inside a Jewish world full of competing hopes and titles, reached for when he needed to describe what he was doing and who had sent him. The chapter works inside that frame, and the reader should carry it through.

Jesus lived inside a Jewish world that already had a vocabulary for the role he was playing. A Jew who spoke with authority about God's rule, who healed and argued and drew crowds, who ate with the wrong people and offended the right people — that person would have been recognised as operating in a tradition that already had names for things like him. The question is not whether the vocabulary existed. It is which of the available words he used, which he refused, and what that tells us.

The first of those words is Messiah.

The word comes from the Hebrew *mashiach*, which means anointed one. In the Hebrew Bible, kings were anointed at their coronation. David was anointed by Samuel in secret before he ever wore a crown. Priests were anointed as part of their installation in the Temple. In one famous story, the prophet Elijah was instructed to anoint Elisha as his successor. The word describes someone set apart, commissioned by God, marked in a public ritual with oil.

By the first century, the word had gathered around it a heavy expectation. In the Jewish world, the anointed one was the figure God would send to deal with the present disaster — to end the occupation, to restore the kingdom, to judge the nations, to rebuild what had been broken, to establish the rule of Torah over the whole people. Every Jewish group had a version of what that

figure would do. No Jewish group had a single agreed picture. The content was contested. What was not contested was that the title was available and that people hoped for it.

The reader should understand what that means for the historian looking at Jesus. If someone in the first century is called a messiah, the word tells us that the people using it thought he belonged to a specific hope that they shared with the rest of their world. It does not tell us exactly what they thought he would do, because the hope itself was not settled. The word is a pointer to a tradition of expectation, not a clean label with one meaning.

Jesus' relationship with the word is complicated in ways that are themselves informative. In the Synoptic Gospels — Mark, Matthew, and Luke — Jesus is called the Messiah by others, most notably by Peter in a famous scene that the book will come back to. But Jesus himself is careful with the word. In Mark, he tells people he heals not to say anything about him. In the Caesarea Philippi scene, when Peter says, "You are the Messiah," Jesus tells him to say nothing to anyone. The reader should understand that the "messianic secret" — the pattern in Mark by which Jesus heals and then tells people not to talk about it, and accepts a confessing word and then tells it to be kept quiet — is one of the most debated features of the Gospel. Scholars have argued for decades about how much of it belongs to Jesus himself and how much belongs to Mark shaping his story.

The honest position is that we cannot separate the two completely. What we can say is that the pattern itself is telling. A movement would not have invented a story in which its founder told people not to say he was the Messiah. That is embarrassing — that is exactly the kind of thing the later tradition would have smoothed out if it could. The embarrassment principle works here: the fact that the story is awkward for the later tradition is one of the reasons to think it is close to what happened. Whatever else we make of the messianic secret, the reader should understand that it is a real feature of the story, and that it means Jesus was not in the business of public messianic self-promotion.

The second word is Son of God.

In the Jewish world Jesus lived in, the phrase carried weight but did not mean what it came to mean later. The book has already introduced the reader to the point that Israel itself was called God's son in the Hebrew Bible — Hosea remembers God saying of Israel, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The king was called God's son in Psalm 2: "You are my son, today I have begotten you." The phrase connected the person who bore it to the covenant, to the kingly line, to the special relationship between God and the people. It did not yet, in Jesus' lifetime, mean what the later church came to mean by it: a claim to divinity in something like the sense that later Christian theology would develop. The reader who knows the later meaning should not read it backwards into the first century.

The earliest source we have that uses the phrase of Jesus at all is Mark, and it uses it at the baptism. The voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The reader should understand the shape of that scene: the voice is addressed to Jesus, not to the crowd. It is a private word inside a public event. It is not a declaration to the people. What it does is tell Jesus, at the moment of his entry into the public story, who he is understood to be within the story's own world. After that, the word is used of him, but not freely. The demons recognise him as the Son of God, and he silences them. The Roman centurion at the cross recognises him as the Son of God, and that is at the end of the story, not the beginning. Mark's Gospel is built so that the claim is most intense at the moment of suffering and death, not at the moment of triumph. The reader should

understand that architecture and not mistake it for a simple statement that everyone knew and believed from the start.

The later Gospels are more explicit. Matthew and Luke include the virgin birth and the angelic announcements that situate Jesus inside a claim about his origin. John's Gospel is the most explicit of all — people call him the Son of God early and often, and Jesus himself makes claims that, read in the light of later theology, are very strong. The reader should understand that the progression from Mark's private word at the baptism to John's explicit and repeated claim is itself a datum. It tells us something about the way the early community's understanding of Jesus developed over time. It does not tell us that Jesus himself, in his lifetime, spoke in the language that John's Gospel gives him. The honest historian does not confuse the later community's vocabulary with the earlier man's.

The third word is the most interesting one, because it is the one Jesus seems to have used of himself, and because it is the one nobody else in the Gospels uses of him.

The word is Son of Man.

It comes from the Hebrew Bible, from the book of Daniel. In Daniel chapter seven, the prophet has a vision of "one like a son of man" coming with the clouds of heaven to stand before the Ancient of Days. To this figure is given "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." The figure receives authority over everything. The reader should understand the context: Daniel was written when the Jews were under foreign occupation, and the vision is a promise that the powers now oppressing them will be stripped of their authority and that God's kingdom will be established. The Son of Man in Daniel is the figure who receives that kingdom, but the kingdom is given on behalf of "the saints of the Most High" — a corporate group of people, not a single individual. The word sits inside a tradition in which an individual figure represents a collective. That ambiguity is real, and it matters.

By the first century, it seems that some Jews had come to read the figure as a single redeemer who would appear at the end. But the evidence for that is not solid, and the chapter should not pretend that it is. What is solid is that Jesus uses the word a good number of times in the Synoptic Gospels, and that he uses it of himself — no one else in the Gospels applies it to him. The reader should understand that the word is probably his own vocabulary, not the later community's, because it is not the word the church later settled on. The church called him Messiah and Son of God and Lord. It did not make a habit of calling him Son of Man. The word looks more like something that came from him than something that was put on him.

What is more, the Son of Man is used by Jesus in several different ways, and the variety is part of what makes the word interesting. He uses it to describe humble service — in Mark, he says the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. He uses it to describe his coming suffering — he tells his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, be rejected, and be killed. And he uses it to describe a future figure coming in glory — he tells his disciples that they will see the Son of Man coming with great power and glory. The same figure is the one who serves and suffers, and the one who comes in glory at the end. The reader should understand that the tension between those uses is not an accident. It is built into the word, because it comes from a tradition in which a figure represents people in suffering and receives authority in the end.

Scholars have debated for a long time whether Jesus had a consistent sense of what the Son of Man meant, or whether the language grew in the movement and was then attributed back to him. The honest answer is that we cannot settle the question. The chapter should not pretend to settle it. What can be said is that a man who uses a Danielic title for himself, who uses it at once to describe service and suffering and future vindication, is a man who thinks he is standing inside a story larger than himself — a story in which God acts and the powers are stripped of their authority and the people he represents are vindicated. That much is visible. The exact shape of his thought is not.

The question of what Jesus thought he was does not resolve into a single answer, and the chapter should not try to force one. But there is a pattern in the evidence that the reader can hold.

Jesus lived inside the Jewish tradition's vocabulary. He used words — Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man — that belonged to that tradition and carried the hopes of that tradition. He was not inventing a new religion with a new vocabulary. He was speaking a Jewish language to a Jewish audience about a Jewish hope.

He was cautious with the titles that could have brought him political trouble. The messianic secret, the silencing of the demons, the command to Peter not to broadcast the confession — all of these suggest a man who was managing how his identity was understood in public because he knew that premature or wrong identification was dangerous. He was not avoiding the question. He was answering it obliquely.

He used one title of himself — Son of Man — that he seems to have shaped in a distinctive way, and that word allowed him to encompass suffering and service and future authority in the same picture. It allowed him to be a part of a story in which his own death was not the end of the matter. That is not nothing. The reader should sit with the fact that a man who uses that word of himself is not simply an ordinary teacher.

He did not fit the political messiah role that was available in his world. The book has already introduced the reader to the fact that the crowd, after the feeding of the five thousand in John, tried to take him by force and make him king, and that he withdrew. The entry into Jerusalem that the next part of the book will describe is provocative but not armed. The Temple action that follows it is a political act in one sense — it is exactly the kind of thing that got him killed — but it is not a rebellion. The reader should understand that Jesus' relationship to political power was complicated and that he was not a revolutionary in the sense a modern reader might mean. He was a man whose proclamation and action unsettled the political order without proposing an alternative programme of power.

He seems to have understood himself as connected to the action of God in a way that was more than teaching. A man who says the kingdom of God has come near, who enacts that kingdom in healings and exorcisms, who redefines the family around the will of God, who uses a Danielic title for himself, is a man who thinks something unusual is happening through him. The reader should not rush past that. At the same time, the reader should not mistake it for the later claim that he was God incarnate. The Jewish vocabulary of sonship and the Danielic vocabulary of the Son of Man do not yet say that. The chapter should not say that. It should say what the sources allow and no more.

There are things we cannot say, and the chapter should say them plainly, because saying them is part of earning the reader's trust.

We cannot say what Jesus' precise self-understanding was. We cannot say whether he thought of himself primarily as a messiah, a prophet, the Son of Man, or something that does not fit any of those labels. The sources do not give us a moment in which he says, "I am X, and this is what X means." The chapter will not invent one.

We cannot say that he thought of himself as divine in the sense that later Christian theology would mean. The Jewish world's sonship language was about a special relationship to God, not about ontological identity. The reader who comes to this chapter carrying the later doctrine should be told, gently, that the later doctrine is not what the first-century vocabulary says.

We cannot say that he expected to die and be raised from the dead in precisely the way the stories later told. The gospel resurrection accounts belong to the next part of the book, and the chapter should not short-circuit them. The reader should understand that the question of what he expected is tied up with the question of the apocalyptic frame, which the next chapter will take up.

We cannot say that he intended to found a religion. The evidence is that he gathered people around a proclamation about God's rule, not around a new institution. The movement that followed him ended up founding something anyway; whether he intended it is a different question.

What we can say is enough to make the next part of the book move.

Jesus was a Jew who reached for Jewish words when he needed to describe what he was doing. He used at least one of them — the Son of Man — in ways that suggest he had a distinctive and remarkable sense of what it pointed to. He was cautious with the others, not because he denied them but because he knew what premature public identification could cost. He was not a politician in the sense the reader might think, and he was not simply a teacher. He was a man who seemed to know that something larger than himself was happening through him, and who moved inside that knowledge toward Jerusalem.

The reader should understand that this much is visible and that the rest is not. The book will not pretend otherwise. The chapter that follows will take up a harder question — whether, in the end, he expected God to act soon, and what that expectation would have meant for the road he was on.

The last thing the reader saw of him in the previous chapter was sitting at the feet of his disciples while his mother and brothers stood outside, unable to reach him, and answering them by redefining the family around the will of God. The reader should carry that scene into this chapter, because it is part of what the question of identity is really about. A man who tells his family that the people sitting around him are now his real family is a man who thinks he is building a new thing inside the old world, and who is willing to cost himself the old thing to do it.

That is the shape of the man the reader has been following. The titles are the language he and his followers used to describe it. The chapter has named what the sources allow and what they do not. The road toward Jerusalem is about to begin, and the reader should understand that the man who redefined the family, who used the Son of Man, who was cautious with the messianic word, is the same man who is about to walk into the city at Passover and do the thing that got him killed. The chapter that follows will ask what he thought would happen when he got there.

The End of the World

A Jewish man in the first century who spoke about the kingdom of God was not making a general statement about divine governance. He was reaching for a word that carried the whole weight of a specific hope — that God would act in history to set the world right, that the present disorder would be ended, that the powers oppressing the people would be stripped of their authority, and that this was not simply a hope for a better future in the long run but something expected to happen soon, while the people speaking were still alive.

The reader who has followed the book this far will recognise the first part of that hope. Chapter eleven described the kingdom as the rule of God breaking into the present. The parables in chapter thirteen unsettled the reader with stories that refused to resolve. The healings and exorcisms in chapter fourteen enacted the kingdom in the world. The table in chapter fifteen made it visible over a shared meal. The fights in chapter sixteen were honest intra-Jewish arguments about what the rule of God should look like in practice. The titles in chapter eighteen — Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man — were the language Jesus and his followers used to describe what he was doing. The book has been building a picture of a kingdom arriving in the present, and that picture is real. The sources support it.

But there is another part of the picture that the book has not yet placed on the table honestly, and that is the thing modern scholarship finds hardest to talk about plainly. Jesus seems to have expected God to act soon.

The word for that expectation is apocalyptic. The book should explain it before it uses it, because the project spec told us to gloss hard words immediately or not use them. Apocalyptic does not mean that someone is predicting a specific date on a calendar, or staging a disaster. It means that the person believes the present world is not final, that God is going to intervene decisively in history, that the present age will give way to a new age, and that this is expected to happen soon — in the lifetime of the people speaking. A Jewish apocalyptic frame in the first century is the picture of the world as it is drawing to a close, and of the kingdom of God arriving as the end of one age and the beginning of another. The reader should carry that definition through the chapter.

The reader might reasonably ask at this point: if Jesus was an apocalyptic figure who expected the world to end soon, why did the book spend a chapter describing the kingdom as breaking into the present? The honest answer is that the book should not have asked the reader to choose between those two things, and it should not ask now. The evidence allows both strands, and they are not separate in the end. The kingdom breaking into the present is one description of the apocalyptic future arriving. The apocalyptic future is the horizon against which the present-tense kingdom makes sense. The book has been describing the present-tense part of the picture in order to make it visible, and now it needs to add the apocalyptic horizon. A reader who has followed the book this far should be able to hold both.

The first piece of evidence is the simplest, and it is the one the book has already introduced the reader to in another form. It is the language Jesus used, and specifically the phrase "the time is fulfilled."

The earliest version we have of Jesus' proclamation, in Mark 1:14-15, reads: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." The phrase "the time

is fulfilled" matters. It does not say "God rules." It says the appointed time has arrived, the moment is now, the thing that was expected is near. The reader should sit with that. The proclamation is not simply that God is sovereign. It is that something is about to happen.

The second piece of evidence is embedded in the sayings the reader has already encountered. It is the apocalyptic content of the Son of Man sayings.

Chapter eighteen described the Son of Man in some detail. The reader should remember that the title comes from Daniel 7, where the figure "like a son of man" comes with the clouds of heaven and receives dominion and glory and a kingdom from the Ancient of Days. The book already said that Jesus seems to have used this title of himself, and that he used it in several different ways: to describe humble service, to describe his own suffering, and to describe a future coming in glory.

The third use is the one that matters now. The "Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" is not a present-tense statement. It is a statement about the end — about the moment when the figure who has suffered and served is vindicated, and the kingdom he represents is fully established. A saying that the Son of Man will come again is apocalyptic content. It describes a future event, and it describes it in language drawn from the Danielic vision of the end of the present age.

The book has already introduced the reader to the difficulty of separating Jesus' own words from the later community's belief. The chapter should not pretend that this difficulty is not real here. By the time the Gospels were written, the community believed Jesus was the Son of Man who had suffered and would come again. It is entirely possible that the sayings attributing that future coming to Jesus are the community's belief reflected back onto his own words. The chapter should name that possibility honestly. The honest counter is that the Son of Man language is the one title Jesus seems to have used of himself, and that the Danielic source of the title is so deeply apocalyptic in its origin that it is difficult to use it without carrying some apocalyptic content with it. The reader should hold that tension. The chapter is not asking the reader to resolve it.

The third piece of evidence is one the reader has already met, in the parables, but has not been asked to read in the full light of what it implies. The parable of the weeds, in Matthew 13, describes a field in which wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest, at which point the weeds are gathered and burned and the wheat is gathered into the barn. The text's own explanation says that the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. The parable of the net says that at the end of the age the angels will separate the evil from the righteous. The parable of the wedding feast says that the door is shut at the end.

The reader should understand that these parables are not simply present-tense stories about the kingdom as it is now. They are stories about the end — about the moment when the present mixture of good and bad is resolved, when the wrong things are removed, when the right things are gathered in, when the door is shut. They assume an end of the age. They assume a judgment. They assume that the present is not final.

A reader who has understood the kingdom as breaking into the present might ask: can the parables be read that way only? The honest answer is no. The parables can be read partly that way, but the content of several of them — the harvest, the end of the age, the separation, the door shut — is apocalyptic content. The book should not say that the parables are only apocalyptic. It should say that they are partly apocalyptic, and that the apocalyptic part is real and visible in the sources.

The fourth piece of evidence is the one most readers will find hardest, because it attributes to Jesus a claim about his own role in the end. It is the saying, recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, that the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of the power of God and come on the clouds of heaven.

The reader should understand that this saying is not simply about the future. It is about Jesus' place in the future. The Danielic Son of Man receives the kingdom. The saying in the Gospels attributes that kingdom-receiving role to Jesus, and it ties that role to his own vindication after suffering. Whatever else the saying means, it means that Jesus saw himself as a figure whose suffering would be followed by a coming in glory — not a coming of the kingdom in general, but a coming of the Son of Man in the kingdom.

The honest position is this: the chapter cannot say with confidence whether Jesus actually said these words in this form, or whether the later community attached them to him. The chapter will not pretend to know. What the chapter can say is that the sources as we have them attribute to Jesus a claim about his own place in the coming of the kingdom, and that this claim is apocalyptic in its content. The reader should understand that this is one of the places where the historical question is sharpest, and where the most careful honesty is required.

The fifth piece of evidence is the earliest Christian writing we have, the letters of Paul, and the expectation that Paul inherits and transmits.

Paul's letters date to the 50s — before the Gospels, before decades of reflection shaped the Gospel accounts. Paul is the earliest Christian writer, and he is worth reading now because he is a witness to what the movement expected, before the tradition had time to soften it.

Paul writes to communities that are expecting the return of the Lord. He speaks of the Lord coming down from heaven, of the dead in Christ rising first, of those who are alive being caught up together with them. He speaks of the present form of the world passing away. He writes to people as if the end is expected soon, and as if living in that expectation is the normal shape of the Christian life.

The reader should understand that Paul's expectation does not prove that Jesus had the same expectation. Paul is writing after Jesus' death, after the resurrection belief, after the community has formed around the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah and that God has raised him. Paul's expectation is the expectation of the community, not necessarily of the man. But the reader should also understand that Paul's expectation did not appear from nowhere. It has a source, and the most likely source is the movement that Jesus began, which had somehow communicated to its first members that something was coming and that the present world was not final.

This is a delicate point, and the chapter should handle it carefully. The reader should not be asked to conclude that Paul's expectation is identical to Jesus' expectation. The reader should be asked to see that Paul's expectation is part of the early evidence for an apocalyptic movement, and that the movement's apocalyptic expectation is difficult to explain if the historical Jesus had no apocalyptic message at all.

Here is what the picture looks like when it is put together honestly.

The sources show a man who lived in a Jewish world where apocalyptic expectation was a live option. He spoke about the kingdom of God in language that carried future and present content together. He used a Danielic title for himself that was inherently apocalyptic in origin. He spoke about the end of the age, about the Son of Man coming in glory, about the harvest and the separation.

The earliest Christian movement, within twenty years of his death, was expecting the Lord to come again, and expecting the present world to pass away. The Gospels, written decades later, preserve sayings that are difficult to explain unless the historical Jesus carried some apocalyptic content in his message.

None of this is single-piece evidence. None of it is a smoking gun. The book should say so plainly, because saying so is part of the honesty the brief asked for. A reader who wants a single piece of text that says "Jesus expected the world to end in his lifetime" will not find it, because the sources do not give it. What the sources give is a consistent pattern, and the pattern is hard to explain without an apocalyptic element in the historical Jesus' message.

Here is what the case against the apocalyptic reading looks like, and the reader should see it honestly too.

The present-tense reading of the kingdom is a real reading, and the book has already made it available to the reader. A reader can hold the present-tense and the apocalyptic content of the kingdom together without choosing, and the sources do not force a choice. The kingdom as rule breaking into the present is not incompatible with the kingdom as the end coming. The chapter should not pretend it is.

The Son of Man sayings are difficult to separate from the later community's belief, and the chapter should not pretend otherwise. A reader who wants to argue that all the apocalyptic content in the Jesus tradition is the work of the later community has a case to make, and the chapter should respect the case enough to name it honestly. The historical question is whether that case is the whole of the truth, and the chapter should say that it cannot settle that question with confidence.

The expectation of the end did not come to pass in the way the earliest Christians expected. The world did not end. Jesus did not return within the lifetime of his first followers. The early Christian community had to adjust to that fact, and the adjustment is visible in the sources — visible in the way the Gospels and the later New Testament writings reword the expectation, re-time it, re-frame it. The book should not hide this. The reader should understand that the failure of the expectation in the way it was first held is itself part of the historical record, and that it is one of the things that makes the question of Jesus' own expectation difficult.

The chapter should now turn to the hardest thing it has to say, and the thing the brief asked for most explicitly. This is the most uncomfortable finding in modern scholarship, and the book will not soften it.

The reader who comes to this chapter from a Christian faith tradition may feel that the ground is moving under them. If Jesus was an apocalyptic figure who expected the world to end soon, then the central claims of the faith — the kingdom, the second coming, the culmination of history in Christ — are built on an expectation that did not come to pass in the way the founder seems to have expected. That is a difficult thing to hold. The chapter should not pretend it is easy. It should not minimise it. It should say it plainly.

The reader should understand, however, that the chapter is not asking them to abandon anything. The chapter is giving an account of what the sources allow us to say about the historical man and his world. It is not giving a theological verdict on the truth or falsehood of the faith. The two things are not the same, and the chapter should keep them separate. A reader who holds a Christian faith can

read the chapter and respond to it in their own way. The chapter's obligation is to say what the historical evidence shows, and to say it honestly.

The reader who comes to this chapter without a faith tradition, or with a secular or hostile one, may expect the book to use the apocalyptic finding as a weapon — to say that Jesus was wrong about the end, that his movement was founded on a failed prophecy, that the whole thing is therefore debunked. The chapter should refuse that move too. The historical account is not a debunking. It is an account of what the man seems to have expected and what the movement seems to have inherited from him. The fact that the expectation did not come to pass in the way it was first held is part of the story, not the end of it. The movement did something remarkable anyway. The chapter has already described it — the gathering of followers, the healings, the table, the fights, the redefinition of the family — and all of that happened inside the apocalyptic expectation, not in spite of it. The reader should understand that the book is not interested in scoring points against anyone. It is interested in telling the story honestly.

The chapter should now leave the reader with the honest position it has been building toward.

Jesus seems to have lived inside a Jewish apocalyptic world, and to have used apocalyptic language, and to have expected God to act. The sources allow us to say that. They do not allow us to say with confidence exactly what he expected would happen, or when, or how his own death fitted into it. They do not allow us to say whether he expected the end to come in his own lifetime, or in the lifetime of his first followers. They do not allow us to say whether his expectation was the whole of his message, or one strand of it alongside the present-tense kingdom language the book has already described.

What the sources allow us to say is enough to change the picture, and the reader should understand that now. The man who is walking toward Jerusalem, who redefined the family, who used the Son of Man, who ate with the wrong people and argued with the Pharisees and healed the sick — that man is not simply a teacher of timeless wisdom. He is a man who seems to have thought that the present world was not final, that God was about to act, that the kingdom was near, and that he had a part in that coming. That is the shape the sources give us, and the chapter should not pretend it is anything less.

The chapter should now hand off, because Part Four is not finished. The reader has been told what Jesus seems to have expected, and the next question is what he was going to do about it. The answer is going to be difficult, because it is going to ask the reader to understand the decision to go to Jerusalem in an apocalyptic frame. If a man expected the kingdom to come near, and if he thought he was the figure through whom it was coming, then Jerusalem was not simply a city to visit. It was the place where the kingdom had to be enacted, where the Temple stood, where the Roman power and the Jewish hope collided. The decision to go there at Passover was not an accident. It was, in the most honest reading of the sources, exactly what a man who thought the kingdom was coming would do.

The last thing the reader saw of him was the man who used the Son of Man and was cautious with the messianic word. The reader should carry that man into this chapter's handoff, and understand that the same man is about to walk into Jerusalem at the festival. The chapter that follows will take up the decision to go, and what he could reasonably have expected would happen when he got there.

Turning South

The reader has just been told, in the previous chapter, that Jesus seems to have expected God to act soon, inside a Jewish apocalyptic frame, and that this expectation is part of what shaped his movement. The reader should carry that into this chapter, because this chapter is about the first thing that expectation made him do.



Galilee to Jerusalem: the road south ran down the Jordan Valley, through Jericho, and up into the Judean hills. (Map from Barton W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament*, 1891; public domain.)

He turned south.

The Gospels speak of this decision in different ways. In Mark, Jesus simply begins to travel toward Jerusalem after a certain point, and the journey becomes the road story of the second half of the book. In Luke, the decision is named more explicitly: when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. In Matthew, the journey is folded into the same overall shape as Mark's, with the same determination behind it. The reader should notice that all three Synoptics name the decision as deliberate, not as a drift. This was not a man who wandered toward Jerusalem because he had run out of things to do in Galilee. This was a man who chose to go, and chose at a specific moment.

The phrase in Luke — "he set his face" — is worth a moment of attention. The reader who knows only the English will hear a figure of speech about determination. The reader who knows something of the Jewish world will hear something slightly more specific. To set one's face toward a place, in the language of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish world that grew from it, is to commit to a journey that has a destiny at the end of it. The prophets set their faces toward cities they were sent to confront. The Psalms speak of a person whose heart has set its face toward a vow made to God. The phrase carries the sense of a journey that is not just geographic but purposeful — a man going somewhere because something is waiting there for him to do, or to receive, or to become. The reader

should carry that slightly heavier sense into the chapter, without the chapter having to argue for it. The sources give the phrase; the chapter should let it do its work.

The chapter will ask what that choice meant, and what he could reasonably have expected would happen when he got there.

The first thing the reader needs to understand is the calendar.

Passover was the festival of liberation. It was the anniversary, in the Jewish year, of the moment when God had acted decisively in history to free the Israelites from Egypt. The story was told at the meal, the meal was the celebration, and the celebration was a statement that the past act of God was not a one-time event but a pattern that could be expected again. Passover was the moment in the year when the hope that God would act again was most natural, most widespread, most at the centre of everyone's mind.

This matters because a man who believed the kingdom was near and that God was about to act would go to Jerusalem at Passover for the same reason a liberation movement would mark the anniversary of a liberation: because that was the moment when liberation was at the centre of the story everyone was telling, when the expectation of a renewed act of God was most natural, when the city was full of people who had come to remember the same thing. Passover was not a random date on a calendar. It was the moment.

The reader should not imagine this as a calendar choice in the modern sense, as if Jesus checked a schedule and picked the nearest available slot. It was deeper than that. Passover was the moment in the year when the story of liberation was being retold everywhere in the Jewish world. A man who believed God was about to act again would not need to think hard about when to go to Jerusalem. The calendar was telling him. He went when the city was remembering liberation, because that was the moment when the action of God was most expected and most visible.

The meal itself is worth a moment of attention, because it is part of what the reader needs to understand about the festival. Passover was not observed in a synagogue. It was observed at home, around a table, with a meal that remembered the exodus by retelling the story and eating the foods that stood for it. The Passover meal was a domestic act of remembrance, and the domestic act was also a political one, because the story being remembered was a story about liberation from an empire. Every year, in homes all over the Jewish world, families retold the story of how God had freed them from Egypt, and every year the story carried the implication that the present empire was not final either. The reader should understand that this is an ordinary thing in the life of a Jewish family, not a radical act in any single year, but that the ordinary repetition of the story is also the accumulation of an expectation — the expectation that liberation is a pattern in the life of God's people, and that the pattern may repeat. A man who expected the kingdom to be near would be carrying that expectation into the festival that was built around the same hope. The chapter should not overstate this. It should say that the Passover meal was part of the atmosphere in which the decision was made, and that the atmosphere was one of remembered liberation and expected repetition.

The second thing the reader needs to understand is the city.

Jerusalem at Passover was not the Jerusalem of any other time. The population multiplied. Pilgrims came from all over Judea and Galilee and beyond — from the villages where Jesus had been speaking, from the towns where his reputation had been spreading, from the countryside where

people had heard about the man who healed and ate with the wrong people and argued with the Pharisees. The city filled with people who had come to remember liberation and who, in the year this book is reconstructing, may have been listening for it to happen again.

The Romans knew this. A prefect named Pilate, who had his normal base in Caesarea on the coast, would bring troops into Jerusalem for the festival. The empire did not treat Passover as a religious holiday. It treated it as a risk factor. The city was full of pilgrims who had come to remember an exodus, and any gathering that looked like it could turn into a disturbance was treated as a threat by the Roman state. Pilate's troops were on the porticoes, on the look-out, on the alert. The city was under surveillance in a way it was not at most other times of the year.

The Temple authorities were on high alert too. The high priest and the council that administered the Temple were responsible for keeping order, for ensuring that the festival did not turn into a riot, for managing the Roman presence, for keeping the peace between the people and the empire. This was one of the most delicate jobs in the Jewish world, and Passover was when it was hardest.

The reader should feel the density of the crowd, the surveillance, the atmosphere of a city that the empire treats as a festival risk. This is not a backdrop for Jesus' action. It is one of the things he was walking into. The next chapter will take up the city in more detail, but the reader needs the sense of it now, because it is what makes the decision legible.

The third thing the reader needs to understand is what the decision was not.

It was not a plan for armed revolt. There is no evidence that Jesus planned violence. The reader should not imagine him gathering a band, planning a seizure of the city, thinking about how to defeat the Roman garrison. There is nothing in the sources that suggests any of that. What the sources suggest is a man who had been saying things that disturbed the peace, who had a reputation, and who chose to go to Jerusalem at the most volatile moment of the year and do something that would be seen.

The reader who comes to this chapter with a picture of Jesus as a political revolutionary — a man with a programme for overthrowing the empire — should understand that the picture is not supported by the sources. Jesus was provocative, and his provocation had political consequences, but he was not a revolutionary in the sense a modern reader might mean. He did not have an army. He did not have a plan for power. He had a message about the kingdom of God, and he had an expectation that God was about to act, and he went to Jerusalem at Passover because that was the moment and the place where the message could be made public in the most consequential way.

It was also not a naive miscalculation. The reader should not imagine a man who walked into Jerusalem not knowing the risks. A man in Jesus' position — with his reputation, with the things he had been saying, with the followers he had gathered, with the controversies he had been involved in — knew that Jerusalem at Passover with Roman troops on the porticoes was a dangerous place to be. He knew the risks. The decision was not made in ignorance. It was made with the risks in view, which is part of what makes it significant. A man who knew the risks and went anyway is a man who thought something was worth the risk.

So what was the upside?

This is the question the brief asks, and the chapter should not dodge it by saying we cannot know. We cannot know exactly. But we can name the range of reasonable expectations, given what the previous chapter established about the apocalyptic frame.

If Jesus believed God was about to act, and Passover was the moment of liberation, and Jerusalem was the place where the Temple stood and the kingdom could be proclaimed — then going to Jerusalem at Passover was exactly what a man in his position would do. The upside was that this was the moment and the place where the kingdom could be enacted, where the prophetic sign could be made, where the confrontation with the present order could take its most public form.

The reader should understand that this is not a strategy document. It was not a plan worked out on paper. It was a man's decision in a specific moment, made from a specific expectation, with a specific understanding of what mattered. The chapter should present it that way, because only that presentation is honest.

What might he have expected would happen? The chapter should name the possibilities without choosing among them.

He may have expected a confrontation with the authorities that would serve as a prophetic sign — a demonstration that would proclaim the kingdom in the city where the Temple stood, in the context of the festival of liberation, in a way that would be seen by the crowd and by the authorities and by anyone watching. The entry into Jerusalem — the next chapter will describe it — is one version of this. A deliberate entry into the city that made a statement, followed by an action at the Temple that made a bigger statement, is the kind of thing a prophetic figure in the Jewish tradition might do, and the chapter should say that.

He may have expected the kingdom to arrive in some form — the decisive action of God, the Son of Man vindicated, the present order overturned. If Jesus believed God was about to act, then Jerusalem at Passover was the place to be when it happened. He may have understood himself as the figure through whom the action would be enacted, or as the figure who would witness it, or as the figure who would be part of it in some way the chapter cannot specify. The chapter should not try to specify. It should say that the expectation was real and the place was where the expectation could be most fully expressed.

He may have expected to be arrested, or even killed, as a consequence of what he was doing — and may have seen that as part of the story rather than a surprise. The apocalyptic frame allows for a sense that the suffering of the righteous is part of the pattern. A man who believed the kingdom was near and that he was part of its coming might well have understood that his own fate was not entirely in his hands and that what happened to him would be understood in the light of the larger story. The chapter should say this carefully, because readers may misread it as a claim that Jesus expected to be killed in a specific way for a specific reason. The chapter cannot show that. It can only say that the apocalyptic frame makes the possibility of arrest and death legible as part of the story rather than a surprise.

He may have expected the kingdom to come near in a way that did not depend on his own survival. If the kingdom was the action of God, then Jesus' own fate was not the whole of it. The reader from chapter nineteen should understand this. The chapter is about a man who expected God to act, and who may have believed that God's action would not be stopped by what happened to him.

The chapter should not choose among these possibilities, and it should say so plainly. What it can say is that the decision was legible. A reader who knows what Jesus seems to have expected — from chapter nineteen — would understand why he went to Jerusalem at Passover. The reader who does not know that would understand the decision less well. The chapter has spent two chapters building the reader's understanding of the apocalyptic frame for this reason. The decision to turn south only makes full sense in that frame.

The reader should understand, too, that the decision was not simply about Jesus. It was about the followers he had gathered. A man who had gathered twelve men around him and a larger group of disciples and a crowd of followers, who had women funding the movement, who had created a disturbance in his own region — that movement was moving toward Jerusalem and the Festival of Liberation. The decision was the movement's decision, and the chapter should say that without making it sound like a committee decision. Jesus seems to have been the one who made it, but he made it in the context of a movement he had gathered.

The chapter should also say something about what the decision meant for the people who had been following him. They knew he was going. They knew the risks. Some of them may have understood the apocalyptic frame better than the chapter presents it. Some of them may have understood it less well. Some of them may have expected him to be arrested and may have been afraid. Some of them may have expected the kingdom to arrive and may have been excited. The chapter cannot say which, because the sources do not say. It can say that the followers who had been with him through the healing of the leper and the eating with the tax collectors and the argument with the Pharisees and the redefinition of the family were about to watch what happened in Jerusalem, and that what happened would matter to them for the rest of their lives.

The chapter should end by handing off to the city itself. The reader has been told why Jesus turned south, and the reader has been told what the decision was and was not. The next chapter will take up the city he was walking into — Jerusalem at Passover, the crowd, the soldiers, the political temperature — and the reader should understand that the city is not a backdrop for what follows. It is a participant. The arrival, the entry, the Temple action — all of that happened in a specific city at a specific moment, and the chapter that follows will give the reader the city in the density it deserves.

A City at Festival

The reader has just been told, in the previous chapter, that Jesus made the decision to turn south and go to Jerusalem at Passover — and that the decision makes sense in the apocalyptic frame the chapter before established. The reader should now be told where he was going.

Jerusalem at Passover was not Jerusalem at any other time of year. The reader should understand this before the next chapter describes what happened there, because what happened depended on what the city was.

The first thing to understand is the crowd.

Pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the three great festivals — Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot — and Passover was the biggest. People came from Judea, from Galilee, from the countryside and the villages, from the towns where Jesus had been speaking and the places where his reputation had

reached. They came to remember the exodus, to eat the Passover meal with their families, to be in the city where the Temple stood. They came in such numbers that the city's population multiplied enormously.

How enormously, exactly, the sources do not say with any precision the reader can trust. Jerusalem's normal population is itself uncertain — somewhere in the neighbourhood of forty or fifty thousand, perhaps, though even that is an estimate rather than a fact. At Passover, with the pilgrims arriving, the number could rise sharply. Some writers have given larger figures, and some have given smaller ones, and the honest chapter does not choose among them with a confidence the sources do not support. What the chapter can say is that the crowding was extraordinary, that the city was fuller than it was at any other time of the year, and that the fullness was part of what made Passover a moment the Roman empire watched carefully. The reader does not need a specific number to feel the density. The reader needs the sense that the streets and the Temple precinct and the markets were crowded with people who had come for the same festival in the same week, and that the crowding could turn in a moment.

The pilgrimage itself is part of what the reader needs to understand. People did not fly to Jerusalem for the festival. They walked. They walked from the villages and the towns and the countryside, in groups, carrying what they needed for the journey and for the meal, and arriving in the city after days or weeks on the road. The journey was part of the festival — the pilgrimage was the act of coming to Jerusalem, and the act of coming was already a statement of devotion and a claim on the city. By the time the pilgrims arrived, they had already done something significant: they had travelled to the centre of the Jewish world for the festival that marked the anniversary of liberation. The reader should understand that the crowd arriving at Jerusalem at Passover was not an accidental collection of people. It was a pilgrim crowd, a crowd that had come on purpose, that had travelled for the festival, that had made the journey because the festival mattered. The crowd was already committed before it arrived.

The reader should also understand that the pilgrims were not a random crowd. They were people who had come to remember liberation. They had come to tell the story of the exodus again, to eat the meal that carried the story, to be in the city where the Temple — the centre of the Jewish world — stood. They had come carrying the same expectation that the previous chapter described: that the act of God in history might repeat, that the pattern might continue, that this year, perhaps, was the year. A city full of people who have come to remember liberation is a city full of people who are thinking, in one way or another, about liberation. The reader should carry that into the next chapter, because it is part of what makes the entry legible.

The second thing to understand is the soldiers.

The Roman prefect of Judea, Pilate, had his normal base in Caesarea on the coast. For the great festivals, he came to Jerusalem. He brought troops with him. The empire did not treat Passover as a religious holiday. It treated it as a risk factor. A festival that celebrated liberation from an empire was a festival that could, in the right circumstances, become the occasion for an attempt at liberation — and the Romans knew this. They brought soldiers into the city to watch the crowds, to look for trouble, to be ready if anything turned.

The reader should feel the surveillance. Roman soldiers on the porticoes, on the walls, on the look-out. A city under watch during its most crowded week, by a force that was there in part to manage the

risk that the festival itself represented. This was not a city at peace in the ordinary sense. It was a city that the empire treated as a festival risk, and the risk was real. The reader should understand that Pilate's presence in the city at Passover was not a personal whim. It was standard practice, and the standard practice existed for a reason. The reason was that the empire knew what Passover was, and knew what a city full of pilgrims remembering liberation could become.

The standard picture of Roman provincial administration is of a small occupying force spread thin across a province, watching for trouble, responding to trouble, preferring not to make trouble unnecessarily because trouble was expensive. Judea was a province of that kind. The Romans governed through local structures — the Temple hierarchy, the Jewish council, the high priest — and they intervened when those structures failed to keep order. At Passover, the local structures were under maximum strain, because the crowd was maximum, because the festival was about liberation, because the crowd was full of people who might, in the right circumstances, decide to act on the festival's message. The Romans came to the city themselves, with their own troops, because that was the week when the local structures might not be enough. The reader should understand that the Roman presence at Passover was not a show of force against a happy crowd. It was a show of force against a crowd that the empire had reason to worry about.

This is one of the things that Fredriksen argues in the most important secondary source for this chapter: that Pilate's response to Jesus should be understood in the context of Roman concern about Passover crowds and anything that looked like it might turn. The reader does not need the secondary source's argument in full, but the reader should understand the background it depends on: that the Romans knew what Passover was, that they had reason to worry about it, that they came to the city with troops for that reason, and that the governor was watching for anything that might become a disturbance. What happens in the next chapter — the entry and the Temple action — lands in this context, and lands hard. The reader should understand the context before the chapter describes what happened, because what happened only makes sense in the context.

The reader who comes to this chapter with a picture of Roman rule as a calm, bureaucratic thing should have that picture corrected. Roman rule in Judea at Passover was not calm. It was watchful, tense, aware of its own insecurity. The governor came to the city for the festival because the festival was the moment when the insecurity was greatest. The troops on the porticoes were there because the empire had learned, over the course of a century of governing the province, that festivals of liberation were moments when trouble could start.

The third thing to understand is the Temple authorities.

The high priest at the time, and whatever council or group administered the Temple, was responsible for keeping order during the festival. This was one of the most difficult jobs in the Jewish world. The Temple was the centre of the celebration, and the Temple was also the place where the Romans had the most reason to watch. The high priest had to manage the crowd, manage the sacrifice, manage the pilgrimage, and manage the relation with the Roman governor and his troops — at the same moment, during the most volatile week of the year.

The reader should understand that the Temple authorities were under pressure from both sides. They were responsible to Rome for order, and they were responsible to the people for the festival. During Passover, those two responsibilities could come into conflict. The crowd wanted the festival. Rome wanted order. The high priest stood between them, trying to keep both satisfied, trying to keep the

peace. The reader should not imagine the high priest as a villain — a man who betrayed his own people for Roman favour — or as a fool. The reader should imagine a man doing a difficult job in a difficult week, trying to keep a city full of pilgrims from turning into a riot while keeping the Roman soldiers from deciding that the city needed to be put down. And the reader should understand that this is the position the high priest was in when Jesus entered the city and then went to the Temple.

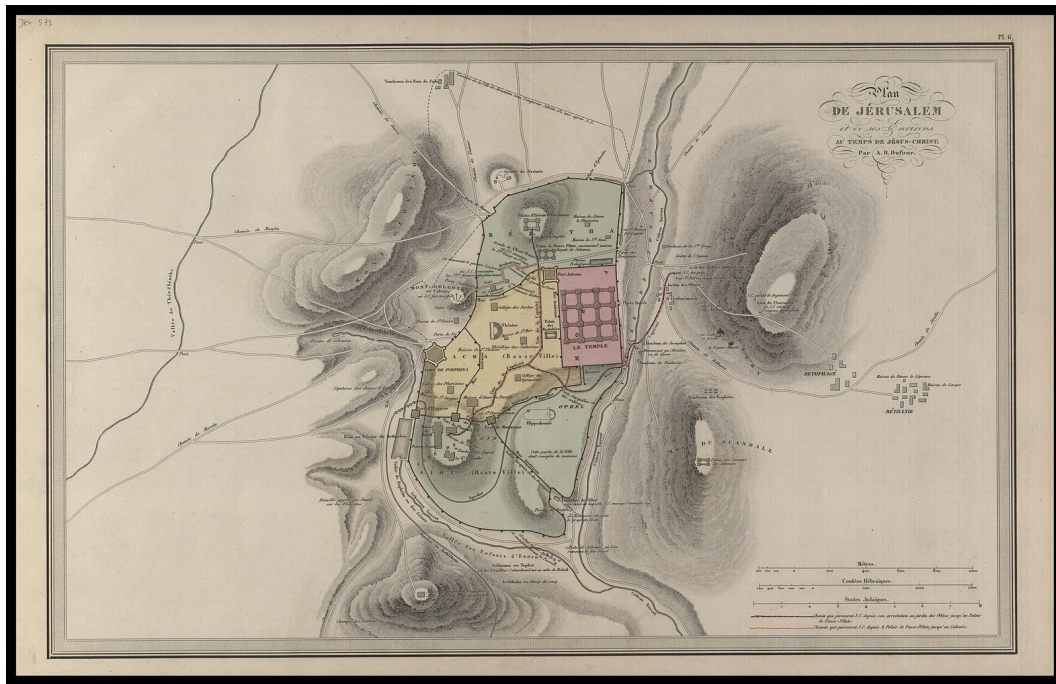
Whatever the high priest thought of Jesus before the entry — and the sources do not tell us what he thought — the entry and the action that followed would have put him under immediate pressure from the Romans. The Romans would have seen the entry as a potential disturbance. The high priest would have been the man responsible for managing it. The reader should carry that into the next chapter, because it is part of why the Temple action that follows is so consequential: it landed on the high priest in the middle of the most difficult week of the year, when he was trying to keep the peace between the crowd and the empire.

This matters for what follows. The entry into Jerusalem and the action at the Temple — the next chapter — happened in this context. They happened in a city where the Temple authorities were trying to manage a dangerous week, where the Romans were watching for trouble, where the crowd was full of people remembering liberation. The entry and the action landed in the middle of all of that, and they landed hard. The reader should understand the context before the chapter describes what happened, because what happened only makes sense in the context.

The fourth thing to understand is the atmosphere.

Jerusalem at Passover was a loud city. The pilgrims were arriving, the markets were full, the Temple courts were full, the air was thick with the smell of the sacrifices and the dust of the roads and the sweat of the pilgrims walking in from the countryside. Passover is in the spring — late March or early April — and Jerusalem in that season is not cool. The city was warm, and crowded, and busy, and full of people who had come for the same reason and who knew they were all together for the same reason. There was a sense in the air of a city holding its breath — celebrating, but celebrating under watch, celebrating in a city where the empire had put soldiers on the walls.

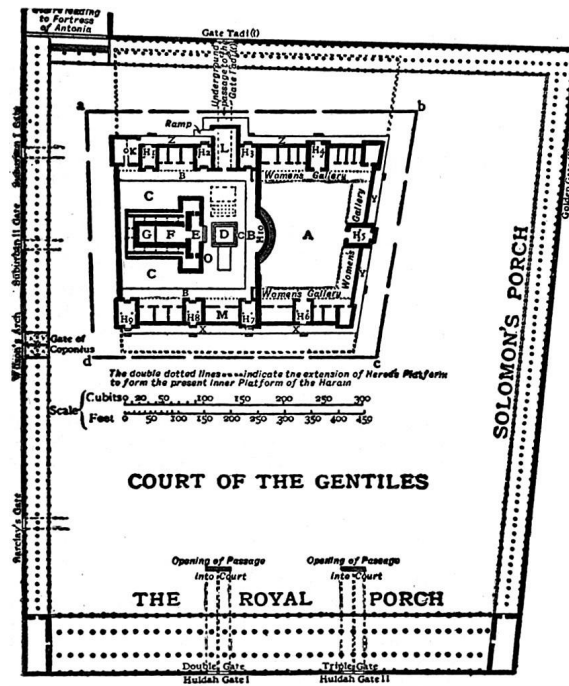
The reader should feel this, because the next chapter describes a man entering this city. The entry made a statement, and the statement could only be read in the context of the city he was entering. A man walking into Jerusalem at Passover, in front of the crowd, in front of the soldiers, in front of the Temple authorities, was doing something the city would notice. The reader needs the city first.



Jerusalem in the first century: a compact city on its ridge, the Temple dominating, the Kidron valley and Mount of Olives to the east. (Map: Auguste Henri Dufour, 19th century; public domain.)

The geography helps the reader feel the city. Jerusalem sat on a ridge in the hills of Judea, with the Temple mount dominating the area around it. Pilgrims coming from the east, from the direction of the Mount of Olives, would approach the city across the Kidron valley and then climb into it. The entrance from that direction framed the city in a particular way — the rise from the valley, the view of the walls and the Temple, the descent into the streets. The entry that the next chapter will describe comes from that direction. The reader should understand the geography well enough to feel the approach, without the chapter having to give a full topographical survey. The point is to make the reader feel present in the city, not to describe every gate and street.

The geography also matters in a practical sense. Jerusalem in the first century was not a sprawling city; it was compact, and the walls and the Temple mount defined its shape. The walls gave the city its boundary and its sense of security; the Temple mount gave the city its religious centre and its political significance. A man entering the city from the east would see the walls first, then the Temple, then the streets below. The reader should have the sense that the city was a city you could enter and move through in a day, and that the key places — the Temple, the markets, the streets where a crowd could gather — were close together. The entry and the Temple action happened in a city where a man could walk from the gate to the Temple in a short time, and where whatever he did could be seen quickly. The geography made speed possible, and speed mattered. The reader should feel that.



Herod's Temple platform: the sanctuary and inner courts at the centre, the Court of the Gentiles — the only court open to non-Jews — as the great outer plaza. (Plan from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., 1911; public domain.)

The Temple itself dominates the city's sense of itself. The Temple mount was enormous — the platform was one of the largest in the ancient world, and the Temple building on top of it was the centre of the Jewish world. Pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for Passover came above all to the Temple, because the Temple was where the presence of God was understood to dwell, and because the sacrifice of the Passover lambs was done at the Temple. The city at Passover was a city centred on the Temple, and the Temple was the first thing many pilgrims saw as they approached. The reader should understand the Temple's place in the city, because the action at the Temple that the next chapter describes will be an action at the centre of the centre.

The reader should leave the chapter with a clear sense of the city.

Jerusalem at Passover was a city at maximum population, maximum tension, maximum surveillance. It was a city full of pilgrims who had come to remember liberation. It was a city where the Roman prefect was present with his troops, watching the crowds on the porticoes. It was a city where the high priest and the Temple authorities were trying to manage a dangerous week, trying to keep the peace between the crowd and the empire. It was a city where the Temple dominated the skyline and the religious life and the political reality. It was a city where the atmosphere was thick with the feeling of a festival that celebrated liberation and where the empire knew that liberation was the subject of the festival.

This is the city Jesus was walking into. The next chapter will describe the entry and the action at the Temple — the thing that got him killed. But the reader should understand the city before the entry, because the entry only makes sense in the city. A man entering Jerusalem at Passover was entering a specific thing, and the chapter that follows should describe it as a specific thing, not as a generic city at a generic festival. The reader who feels the city will understand the entry better. The reader who does not feel the city will not.

The Demonstration

The reader has been told, in the previous chapter, where Jesus was going and what the city was. The reader has been told that Jerusalem at Passover was a city at maximum population, maximum tension, maximum surveillance. The reader has been told that Pilate was in the city with his troops, that the high priest was trying to keep the peace between the crowd and the empire, that the crowd was a pilgrim crowd that had walked to the centre of the Jewish world for the festival of liberation. The reader has been told that whatever happened next happened inside that city at that moment, and that what happened would only make sense in that context.

Now the reader is told what happened.

The entry into Jerusalem was not a parade in the modern sense. The reader should understand this before the chapter describes it, because the modern sense is the wrong sense. A modern parade is a celebration of something that has already happened — a victory, a holiday. A modern triumphal parade is a procession of a conqueror through a city, with the conquered watching, with the soldiers marching, with the spoils being carried. The reader should not imagine the entry into Jerusalem as a modern parade, and the reader should not imagine it as a modern triumphal parade either.

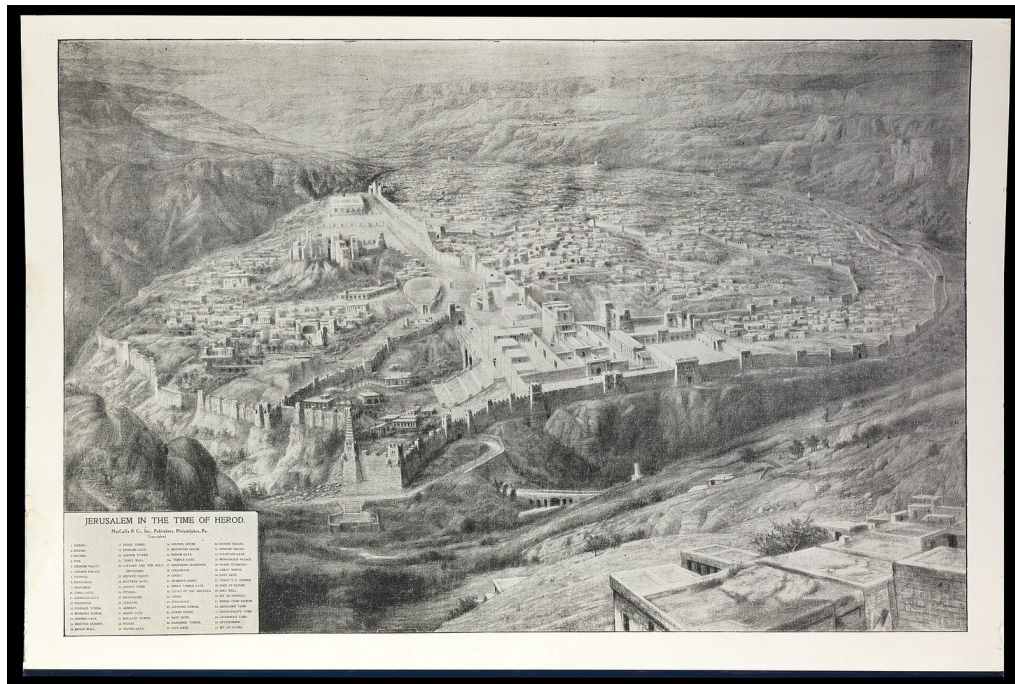
What the reader should imagine is a demonstration. A man arriving in a city with a following, making a public claim in the open, in front of a crowd that has come for the festival, in a city where the empire has put soldiers on the walls. A demonstration is a public act that says something and is meant to be seen. The entry into Jerusalem was a demonstration, and it was a demonstration that said something specific.

The Gospels describe the entry in similar but not identical terms. The Synoptics — Mark, Matthew, and Luke — describe a man arriving from the east, from the direction of the Mount of Olives, with a crowd, on an animal. John describes a crowd meeting a man who was coming into the city. The details differ, and the chapter will note them. But the basic shape is the same in all four Gospels: a man comes into Jerusalem in a public way, with a crowd, on an animal, and the crowd says something.

The reader should understand that the basic shape is the same because the event is the same. The Gospels agree on the main elements: Jesus comes into Jerusalem, in a public way, with a following, on a donkey or a colt, and the crowd acclaims him. The Gospels differ on the details — on the exact words of the crowd, on the exact route, on the exact animal, on the exact arrangement of the disciples — but they agree on the shape. The reader should understand that the shape is what matters for the historical reconstruction, and that the shape is enough to tell the reader what the event was.

The reader should also understand that the event is real — the Gospels agree on the shape because the event happened, and the event is not a later invention. The reader should understand that a man entering Jerusalem in a public way, with a following, on a donkey, at Passover, is not the kind of thing the later church would invent. The later church might invent a more glorious entry, or an entry with an army, or an entry that established Jesus as the king of the world. The later church would not invent an entry on a donkey, with a crowd shouting "Hosanna," in a city where the empire had soldiers on the walls. That is too awkward, too specific, too dangerous. The embarrassment principle applies here: the entry is the kind of thing that would not have been invented, and that is one of the reasons to think it is close to what happened.

The entry comes from the east. The reader should understand the geography, because the geography matters.



The pilgrim's approach: down from the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley, and up into the city — the direction from which Jesus entered Jerusalem. (Reconstruction, MacCalla & Co., early 20th century; public domain.)

Pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the festivals came from the east, from the direction of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley, and then into the city. The approach from the east was the approach of the pilgrim, the approach of the person coming to the city for the festival. The entry of Jesus comes from the east, from the direction of the Mount of Olives, and the reader should understand that this is the pilgrim's approach — the approach of someone coming to the city for the festival. The entry is shaped by the geography of the pilgrim's approach.

The Gospels say that Jesus sent two disciples to find a colt or a donkey for him to ride. The Synoptics give the detail of the colt — a young donkey, the foal of a donkey. Matthew adds the detail that the disciples brought both a donkey and a colt, though the reader should not be too literal about this; the Gospels are not giving a precise veterinary account of the animals. The reader should understand that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an animal — a donkey or a colt — and that the animal is significant, because the animal is part of the statement the entry is making.

The animal is a donkey, and the reader should understand why a donkey matters. A donkey is not a warhorse. A donkey is not a symbol of military power. A donkey is a humble animal, a beast of burden, the animal of a peasant or a traveller, not the animal of a king or a general. A man entering Jerusalem on a donkey is not making a military statement. He is making a different statement — a statement about the kind of king he is, or the kind of king the one coming is. The reader should understand that the donkey is part of the claim, and that the claim is about a different kind of power.

The reader should understand that the donkey is connected to a prophecy. Matthew and John both make explicit reference to Zechariah 9:9: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The reader should understand

that the entry is an enactment of this prophecy, and that the prophecy is about a king who comes in humility, not conquest. The reader should understand that the entry is saying, in the language of the Jewish scriptures, that the king who is coming is the humble king of Zechariah, not the warrior king of the empire.

The reader should also understand that the Zechariah prophecy is a political statement, not a religious statement in the modern sense. Zechariah 9 is about the king of Zion, the ruler who comes to Jerusalem. The prophecy is about the king of Israel, the king of the Jewish people. The entry is saying, in the language of the Jewish scriptures, that the king of Israel is coming, and that the king of Israel is the humble king of Zechariah. The reader should understand that this is a statement about the kind of kingdom Jesus is proclaiming, and that it is a statement that contrasts with the Roman imperial way of doing power — the emperor on a horse, the legions, the conquest.

The reader should understand that the entry is deliberately provocative in its context. A man entering Jerusalem at Passover, in front of a crowd, on a donkey, making a statement about kingship, with Roman soldiers on the walls — even if the statement is peaceful, even if the king comes on a donkey, the entry is a public claim in a city under military occupation. The Romans knew what a king entering a city meant. They did not need to be told. The entry was a demonstration, and demonstrations were dangerous.

The crowd that accompanied or met Jesus shouted. The reader should understand what the crowd shouted, because the words matter.

The Synoptics give the words. In Mark 11:9–10, the crowd that went ahead and the crowd that followed shouted: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

The reader should understand that these words are not a parade chant. The words are a statement, and the statement is a political and religious statement. "Hosanna" is a word of salvation, a cry for help — "save now" — a liturgical word from the Psalms. The crowd is not just cheering a man who has arrived. The crowd is making a statement about the kingdom of David — the kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of liberation. The words are not a generic acclamation. They are a specific acclamation, and they are a specific acclamation that would have been heard by the Roman soldiers on the walls and by the Temple authorities in the Temple.

The reader should understand that the phrase "the coming kingdom of our father David" is particularly significant. The crowd is not just acclaiming Jesus as a teacher or a healer. The crowd is acclaiming him as the bringer of the kingdom of David — the kingdom of Israel. The reader should understand that this is a statement about the kingdom, and that the statement is political, because the kingdom of David is a political kingdom, the kingdom of Israel. The reader should understand that the crowd is making a political claim, and that the political claim is being made in a city under military occupation, in front of Roman soldiers.

The reader should also understand that the Gospels may have shaped the words. The "Hosanna" cry is a liturgical formula from the Psalms, and the Gospels' use of it may reflect the later church's understanding of the entry. The reader should not assume that the exact words are what the crowd said. The reader should assume that the crowd said something that the Gospels have recorded and shaped, and that the something was an acclamation of Jesus as the one who comes in the name of the Lord and as the bringer of the kingdom of David.

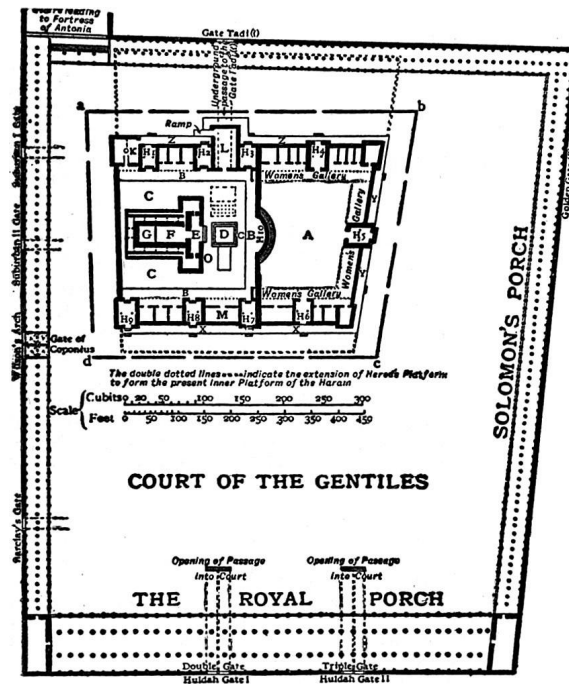
The reader should also understand that John's Gospel gives a different version of the crowd. In John 12:12–19, the crowd that met Jesus was the crowd that had been at the raising of Lazarus — the crowd that had come to Bethany and then went to Jerusalem. The reader should not be confused by this difference. The reader should understand that the Gospels are giving different versions of the same basic event, and that the basic event is the same: a man comes into Jerusalem, and the crowd acclaims him.

The entry is not the end of the story. After the entry, Jesus goes to the Temple.

The reader should understand that the Temple is the next thing the reader needs to understand, because the Temple is where the next thing happens. The reader has been told, in the previous chapter, what the Temple is — the centre of the Jewish world, the place where the presence of God was understood to dwell, the place where the pilgrims came to offer sacrifices. The reader has been told that the Temple dominated the city, that the Temple was the first thing many pilgrims saw as they approached, that the Temple was the centre of the centre. The reader should carry that into this chapter, because the Temple action is an action at the Temple, and an action at the Temple is an action at the centre of the centre.

The Gospels describe the Temple action in similar terms. In Mark 11:15–19, Jesus enters the Temple and drives out those who were selling and buying. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple. And he taught: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." (Mark 11:17, quoting Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11).

Matthew 21:12–17 gives a similar account, with additions — the healing of the blind and lame in the Temple, the children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David." Luke 19:45–48 gives a similar account, with some differences in the language. John 2:13–22 gives a different account, set earlier in Jesus' ministry, but with the same basic elements — the cleansing of the Temple, the whip of cords, the saying about the temple of his body. The reader should understand that the Gospels give different versions of the Temple action, and that the chapter should rely on the Synoptics for the action at the end of Jesus' life, and should note John's version without getting confused by the chronological difference.



The Court of the Gentiles — the outer court where the money-changers and animal-sellers did business, and where Jesus overturned their tables. (Same plan as Figure 7; see Maps appendix.)

The reader should understand what the action was, practically. Pilgrims came to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. They brought animals from their flocks, or they bought them in the Temple precinct. The Temple tax had to be paid in the Temple currency, so money had to be changed. The sellers and money-changers were doing business in the Temple courts, in the Court of the Gentiles — the outer court, the only part of the Temple where Gentiles could come. The action of Jesus was to overturn the tables and the seats and to object to what was happening in the Court of the Gentiles.

The reader should understand why the action is significant. The action is an action at the Temple — the centre of the centre. The action is an action at the Temple during Passover — the week when the Temple was busiest, when the pilgrims were offering their sacrifices, when the money-changers and the sellers were most active, when the Temple was at its most crowded and most watched. The action is a public act, and a public act at the Temple during Passover is a serious thing. The reader should understand that the action is not a simple protest against business in the Temple. It is an act of prophetic significance, and it is an act of political significance, and the two are not separable.

The reader should understand what the action was saying. Jesus' words quote two passages from the Jewish scriptures. Isaiah 56:7 says that the Temple will be "a house of prayer for all the nations." Jeremiah 7:11 asks whether the Temple has become "a den of robbers." The reader should understand that Jesus is quoting these two passages and making a claim: the Temple should be a house of prayer for all the nations, and it has become something else — a place where commerce is done, a place where the Gentiles are pushed out, a place that is not what it should be.

The reader should understand that the Isaiah citation is particularly significant. "A house of prayer for all the nations" is a vision of the Temple as inclusive — as a place where the Gentiles can pray. The action of Jesus is in the Court of the Gentiles, the only part of the Temple where Gentiles could come. The reader should understand that the action of Jesus is a statement about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Temple — a statement that the Court of the Gentiles should be a place of prayer, not a

market. This is a significant claim in the context of the first century, when the Temple was the centre of Jewish identity and the Gentiles were on the margins.

The reader should also understand that the action has a political dimension. The Temple was the centre of the Jewish world, and the Temple was under the control of the high priest and the Temple authorities, who were in turn under the control of Rome. An action at the Temple that disrupts the Temple commerce and challenges the Temple authorities is an action that the authorities cannot ignore. The reader should understand that the action is political in the sense that it challenges the authority of the people who ran the Temple, and that this challenge is the kind of thing that got Jesus killed — not because he was leading an armed revolt, but because he did something that the authorities could not allow to stand.

The reader should also understand that the action may be tied to the entry. The entry invoked the kingdom of David. The Temple action invoked the prophetic tradition and the vision of the Temple as a house of prayer for all nations. The reader should understand that the two belong together — the entry is about the kingdom, and the Temple action is about what the kingdom means for the Temple. The reader should understand that the pair of actions — the entry and the Temple action — is a deliberately provocative pair that said something about the kingdom and about the Temple and about who was in charge.

The reader should understand that the authorities could not leave it alone.

After the entry and the Temple action, the Synoptics describe the response of the authorities. In Mark 11:18, "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" looked for a way to destroy Jesus. The reason is that "all the crowd was spellbound at his teaching." The reader should understand that the response is immediate and serious. The authorities cannot ignore the entry, because the entry was a public claim. They cannot ignore the Temple action, because the Temple action was a public challenge. They cannot ignore the crowd's response, because the crowd's response was a threat to their authority.

The reader should understand that the authorities' response is not cartoon villainy. The authorities are men doing their job, and their job is to keep order in a city under occupation during a volatile festival, and a man who enters the city in a way that looks like a king entering his city, and then goes to the Temple and overturns the tables and challenges the Temple commerce, is a man whose actions they cannot leave alone. The reader should understand that the authorities' response is shaped by the context — the Passover crowds, the Roman soldiers on the walls, the Temple authorities trying to keep the peace — and that the context makes the response more serious than it would be at another time.

The reader should also understand that the authorities' response is shaped by their own interests. The Temple authorities had a stake in the Temple commerce, and an action that disrupted the Temple commerce was a threat to their income and their authority. The reader should not make the Temple authorities into cartoon villains, but the reader should understand that they had a stake in what was happening, and that the stake made them more likely to respond seriously.

The reader should understand that the pair of actions — the entry and the Temple action — is the thing that got Jesus killed. Not because he was leading an armed revolt. Not because he was planning to overthrow the empire. But because he did something in the centre of the centre of the Jewish

world at the most volatile week of the year, with Roman soldiers on the walls and the high priest trying to keep the peace, and the authorities could not ignore it.

The reader should carry this into the next chapter, which takes up the last meal. The last meal happened after the entry and the Temple action, in the context of the authorities looking for a way to destroy Jesus — part of the same story, the same story about a man who did something in the centre of the centre of the Jewish world at the most volatile week of the year, and who was killed for it.

Part Five: Seven Days

The Last Meal

You have been told about the last meal — the bread, the cup, the words spoken over them, the betrayal predicted at the table, the room that would become the most famous room in the religious memory of the world. The story is embedded so deep that even people who have never read the Gospels know its shape: a meal, a prediction, a departure into the night.

We can say less about that room than most tellings assume.

The Gospels call it a large upper room in a house in Jerusalem. That is all the address we get. We don't know whose house. We don't know who had made it available or why. The tradition tells us the disciples went to prepare the meal there — that someone in the city had offered the space, that the room was ready. We can say this much: the movement had contacts in Jerusalem, or the meal could not have been prepared. Beyond that, the room's owner, its appearance, its position in the city — we don't know. The room is known to us as a place of memory, not as a place we can point to.

This matters because the room is part of what the reader has been carrying. Chapter 22 ended in Jerusalem at Passover — the pilgrim crowd, the soldiers on the porticoes, the Temple authorities under pressure, a city holding its breath under watch. The reader reaches chapter 23 feeling the city outside the door. Whatever happened at that meal happened in this city, at this week, under these conditions. The room is inside a city under surveillance.

The tradition suggests the meal was prepared in advance. A man in his early thirties with a following, arriving in a city at the most volatile week of the year, needed somewhere to eat. The city had people who would make a room available — followers, sympathisers, people who had been healed, people who simply wanted to help. The meal was not improvised. It was planned. Jesus was not wandering into this week without preparation. He knew where he would eat. He knew the room. (We just don't know which one.)

What was on the table? We can say less than we want to.

If the meal was a Passover meal — and the Synoptics say it was — then the table would have held the elements of the festival: a roasted lamb, unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, the other items of the Seder as practised in the first century. But the Seder as a fixed ritual with a set sequence did not yet exist in the form later Jewish tradition knows it. The first century meal was a family festival meal, not a liturgy. We cannot reconstruct its sequence. We cannot say exactly what was eaten.

If the meal was not a Passover meal — as John's Gospel implies, placing it before the festival — then the table would have been a normal Jewish meal, with bread and wine and the food of an ordinary supper. The Passover connection would then be theological rather than calendrical: the tradition would remember the meal in relation to the festival without it having been the festival meal itself.

The sources disagree, and we cannot force them to agree.

The Synoptics — Mark, Matthew, and Luke — place the meal on the first day of Unleavened Bread, the evening when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed. Read the Synoptics straight, and the last meal happens on the night of Passover, the same night the lambs were being killed in the Temple.

John places the meal on the evening before the day of preparation, the day before the lambs were killed. In John, Jesus dies on the afternoon of the day of preparation — at the hour, the tradition implies, when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. The last meal in John is the night before. The connection to Passover is in the meaning, not the calendar.

These two accounts cannot both be literally true of the same evening. One tradition has moved the meal in relation to the festival, or both have. The disagreement is real, and it is one of the most important disagreements in the Gospel traditions — because it tells us something about what the early church made of the meal, and because it means we cannot simply say "the last supper was a Passover Seder" or "the last supper was not a Passover Seder" and expect that to be the end of the matter.

The honest position is the one the brief asks for: we give the reader the range of what's possible without selecting.

Before we get to what was said at the meal, one more thing: the meal was a Jewish meal, and everything about it was Jewish.

Jesus was a Jew. His disciples were Jews. The room was in Jerusalem. The words spoken over the bread and the cup, whatever their exact form, were spoken in Aramaic. The meal's deepest context was the Jewish world: the Torah, the Temple, the covenant, the festival of liberation. The Eucharist the church would build from this meal is, at its root, a Jewish meal that acquired new meaning.

We have several versions of the words spoken over the bread and the cup, and they do not agree.

The earliest is Paul's, in a letter written in the mid-50s — within twenty years of the meal itself. Paul says he received the tradition and passed it on: "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

Paul gives us the meal as command and memory. The meal is something to be repeated. The meal is a proclamation of the Lord's death.

Mark's Gospel, written around 70, gives us a different form: "Take; this is my body." And over the cup: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Matthew's version is close to Mark's but adds "for the forgiveness of sins" — a phrase that belongs to Matthew's theological development, not to the meal itself as it happened. Luke's version is different again, with its own sequence and additions.

John's Gospel has no institution narrative at all. In John, the meal's symbolic act is the footwashing — Jesus washing his disciples' feet, including the feet of the one who would betray him, including the feet of the one who would deny him. John's meal is a farewell discourse, a long teaching, a preparation for departure. John gives us no Last Supper in the shape the church would come to know.

So we have Paul's version, Mark's, Matthew's, Luke's, and John's. They share a family resemblance: a meal, a break of bread, a cup, a command or a saying, a meaning attached. They diverge in the details of the words and the order and the significance.

The versions are not transcripts. They are memories — theological memories, shaped by the communities that carried the meal into their worship. The gap between the meal as it happened and the meal as it is remembered in Paul and the Gospels is a gap we cannot close.

What can we say sits underneath the versions?

We can say that Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples at this meal. We can say that he took a cup, gave thanks, and offered it. We can say that he said something about the bread being his body and the cup being his blood or the covenant or both. We can say that he told the disciples to do this in remembrance of him, or something close to that.

These are the things the family of traditions shares. They are also things that could have been said at a Jewish meal — bread, blessing, breaking, sharing, cup, covenant language — without yet being the Eucharist the church would make of them.

What we cannot say is what the exact words were. What we cannot say is whether Jesus meant to found a ritual that would be repeated. What we cannot say is whether the meal was the institution of the Eucharist as the early church understood it, or whether that meaning was layered onto the meal by the communities that remembered it. What we cannot say is whether Jesus knew, as he broke the bread, that this was the meal that would be remembered above all others.

The tradition tries to answer that last question anyway. It gives us predictions. It gives us a man who seems to know what is coming.

At the meal, according to the Synoptics, Jesus announces that one of those eating with him will betray him. The disciples react with distress. Each one asks, "Surely not I?" The question is uncomfortable — not because the disciples are wicked, but because they are human, and the possibility that they could betray the man they follow is real to them. Peter, who will deny Jesus three times before the night is over, is among them. The tradition does not spare its heroes. The disciples at this meal are not certain of themselves. They are frightened.

Jesus says the betrayer is one of the twelve. The Synoptic version: one who dips bread into the bowl with him. A small detail — a gesture of ordinary meal fellowship, the dipping of bread into a common dish. The same intimacy that marks the meal becomes the marker of the betrayal. The man who breaks bread with you is the man who will hand you over.

John tells the story differently and more starkly. In John, Jesus knows who will betray him. He gives a piece of bread to Judas. Then "Satan entered him." Then Jesus tells him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." Judas goes out into the night. John's version is the one that makes the meal feel like a scene in a play — everything known, everything arranged, the betrayal moving forward in full view. It is also the version that is hardest to read as history.

The honest sentence about these predictions is the one we have been learning to say: we don't know what the actual meal contained in the way of foreknowledge.

Did Jesus predict his betrayal at this meal? Probably, in the sense that the tradition remembers a prediction and the prediction shapes the meal in the memory. But prediction is not foreknowledge. A man who has just done something in the Temple that the authorities cannot ignore, a man whose

following has attracted attention, a man in a city under surveillance at the most volatile week of the year — such a man could reasonably expect danger. He could have said to his disciples, in some form, that trouble was coming. That is prediction within the range of what a sensible man would say. It is not the same as knowing, at the table, that Judas would go out that night and hand him over.

The historical man at the table may have been living inside a more uncertain frame: danger is coming, and I can feel it, and I have said things that make it more likely, and my disciples are frightened, and one of them may fail me — but whether I know the exact shape of what happens next, whether I know which one will betray me, whether I know that this is the last meal — these are questions the sources cannot settle.

The reader should also understand something uncomfortable about Judas.

Judas is at the table. In Mark and Matthew, Judas asks, along with the others, "Surely not I?" and Jesus says, "You have said so." In John, Jesus identifies Judas by name and sends him out. In every version, Judas is present at a meal where his betrayal is known about — or partly known about, or predicted — and the meal goes on. The disciples sit with the man who will betray them. The meal continues. The bread is broken. The cup is shared. The words are spoken.

The tradition does not explain why Judas betrayed Jesus. Later story-telling will try — the silver, the devil's entry, the strain of disillusionment, the political calculation, the pressure of the authorities. None of it is the kind of clean motive a reader wants. We don't know why Judas did what he did. And the meal happened with that unknown in it. Judas is not a plot device. Judas is one of the twelve. Judas breaks bread with the man he will hand over. The discomfort is part of what the meal was.

After the meal, the mood shifts. The Synoptics have Jesus predict the dispersal of the disciples: "You will all become deserters, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" This is from Zechariah 13:7 — the kind of language a Jew would use in a moment of crisis: the shepherd is struck, the sheep are scattered, the movement falls apart. The prediction is fulfilled. The disciples do run.

John's meal is followed by a different tradition: the long farewell discourse — chapters of teaching, of promise, of comfort, of the coming Advocate. John's Jesus knows what is coming, and he speaks to it at length. The two traditions — the Synoptic meal of prediction and distress, the Johannine meal of farewell and assurance — give us different moods at the same point in the story.

The meal ends. The Synoptics have the disciples singing a hymn — probably the Hallel psalms, the psalms sung at Passover — and then going out to the Mount of Olives. The meal is over. The table is cleared. The room is empty, or about to be. The city is still outside the door.

And then the arrest happens.

What we have, at the end of the meal, is a real meal that happened in Jerusalem at Passover time, with Jesus and his disciples; a family of memories about what was said and done at it, which diverge in the ways memories diverge; a meal that became the Eucharist, and whose meaning in the early church was not settled in a single form; a meal about which we can say some things with confidence and other things not at all.

The meal becomes the Eucharist. The bread and cup become the repeatable ritual of the church. The words "do this in remembrance of me" become the command that structures Christian worship for the next two thousand years.

It happened quickly. Paul's letter, written in the 50s, already assumes the meal as a ritual to be repeated, already quotes the institution words, already treats the meal as the church's practice. Within twenty years of the meal itself, the memory of the meal had been turned into a ritual. That is fast — fast enough to make the historian cautious about assuming that the ritual preserved the meal whole. The meal that became the Eucharist was a real meal. The Eucharist is the tradition's memory of that meal, shaped for worship and theology. The two are not the same thing.

The meal's meaning was not settled in the first century either. Paul gives it one shape — the body and blood, the new covenant, the remembrance. The Synoptics give a closely related shape — the same elements, the same covenant language, the same command. John gives a different shape — footwashing, farewell, love, the command to love one another as the distinctive mark of the disciples. Different communities remembered the same meal and attached different meaning to it.

The meal's timing in relation to Passover — the Synoptic version and the Johannine version — is itself part of the meaning. Whether the meal was a Passover meal or a meal that happened before Passover, the tradition tied the meal to the festival of liberation. The last meal of Jesus is remembered in relation to the Exodus story. The bread and cup are remembered in relation to the covenant. The death that follows is remembered in relation to the Passover lamb. The connections are real — the connections the early church made, the connections that made the meal matter — but they are also the connections the historian cannot untangle from the memory that made them.

The room we don't know. The exact words we can't recover. Whether it was a Passover Seder or a final meal near Passover, we can't be sure. Whether Jesus knew it was the last meal, we can't say. Whether Judas knew, we can't say. Whether others beyond the twelve were there, we can't say.

What we can say is that the meal happened, that it was a Jewish meal in a Jewish room in a city under watch, that it was the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples, that it was remembered and reshaped by the communities that carried it, and that the tradition which grew from it — the tradition of the bread and the cup, the tradition of the footwashing, the tradition of the farewell — is the tradition the reader is now living inside, whether she knows it or not.

The meal is over. The disciples have sung the hymn. They have gone out into the night. Outside the city, across the Kidron valley, in a garden where Jesus has often met with his disciples, the arrest is waiting.

The next chapter is about how it happened — the mechanics of a night arrest, the piece that doesn't fit, the reason the authorities wanted it quiet, and the moment when the movement's confrontation with the authorities became irreconcilable.

The Arrest

The Mount of Olives at night is a ridge above a city that is already too full. Jerusalem at Passover was at maximum population, maximum tension, maximum surveillance; the reader has been given the city itself in the previous chapter. From the ridge, the Temple mount is visible as a blaze of light in the dark — the Temple lit for the festival, the pilgrimage going on below. The Kidron valley is a dark cut between the ridge and the wall. And on the far side of that cut, on the lower slopes of the eastern hill, is a garden.

The garden is called Gethsemane. The name is remembered, not explained. John's Gospel adds the one detail that makes the place matter here: this was a place Jesus knew. Judas knew it too, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So when the authorities were looking for a way to act, and someone inside the circle offered to show them where to find him, the place was ready.

This is the thing to notice about the arrest from the start: it was a managed operation, not a capture by chance. The authorities did not search Jerusalem for Jesus. They went to a place they had been told about, at a time they had been told about, with a group prepared for what they expected to find. The night, the garden, the signal — these are the components of a removal designed to happen out of sight of the pilgrim crowd.

The crowd itself is worth a moment's attention, because the crowd is the reason the arrest took the form it did. Jerusalem at Passover was packed. Pilgrims had walked from the villages and towns of the Jewish world to be at the Temple for the festival of liberation. The streets were full. The porticoes had soldiers on watch. The high priest was under pressure from both sides — responsible to Rome for order, responsible to the people for the festival. An arrest in the middle of that crowd, during that week, would have risked a riot. A riot during Passover, with Roman troops already present, was exactly the thing the authorities most wanted to avoid. So they moved at night, across the valley, to a place outside the walls, with enough force to make the arrest stick and not so much as to draw attention across the city.

The group that went to the garden is described differently by the different Gospels, and the differences are themselves informative. Mark says a crowd came, with the chief priests and the scribes and the elders — the Temple authorities — and a servant of the high priest present. John is more specific: a Roman cohort with the Temple police. The word cohort is Roman military vocabulary, and it signals something the reader should carry: this was not an operation the priests conducted on their own. The arrest involved Roman authority, or at least the presence of Roman force in a form that the Temple could not have mustered alone. Whether the full cohort came or only a detachment, the point is that the move against Jesus required the kind of force the Romans controlled. The priests wanted Jesus out of the city without a public disturbance; the Romans were the force that made a night removal possible.

The group carried swords and clubs. This matters less as a military detail than as a sign of what the arresting party expected. They expected resistance — or at least they prepared for it. This is not a party coming to talk. It is a party coming to take a man who, in their judgment, had become a problem and who, in their judgment, might not go quietly.

The signal is the detail that makes the whole thing look prepared. Judas had agreed to identify Jesus, and the Gospels give the signal: a kiss. "The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him and lead him away under guard." A kiss is an act of intimate fellowship — the kind of thing a disciple would do to his teacher at the end of an evening, a gesture of greeting or affection. It is also a signal that cannot be mistaken in the dark. The same intimacy that marked the last meal — the sharing of bread, the dipping of bread into a common dish, the closeness of the table — becomes the instrument of the arrest.

This is uncomfortable, and the tradition does not sand it down. The man who at the meal broke bread with the one he would hand over now uses the ordinary sign of discipleship to deliver his master to the authorities. The movement's own insider has become its undoing. This is not a stranger who

betrays Jesus. It is one of the twelve. The discomfort is not an invention of later story-tellers trying to make the scene dramatic; it is in the tradition from the beginning.

What we cannot know is why Judas did it. The Gospels do not give us a motive we can evaluate. The thirty pieces of silver is a later tradition layer — part of the story that grew around Judas, not part of the arrest scene itself. The field of blood, the name Akeldama, the story of what happened to the money — these belong to the later tradition. At the moment of the arrest, what we have is a man who was one of the twelve, who was at the last meal, who went out into the night, who led the authorities to a garden he knew, and who did this in a way the tradition records without explaining. We don't know whether he was paid. We don't know whether he was disillusioned. We don't know whether he was frightened, or pressured, or acting on some impulse the Gospels don't name. The tradition gives us Judas the actor, not Judas the motive. The fact that the tradition cannot give us a clean motive is itself a piece of information: the early community that carried these stories did not know either, or did not feel able to say.

His name is the one more thing worth mentioning and then leaving alone. Judas Iscariot. The origin of "Iscariot" is unclear. Some readers have taken it as meaning "man of Kerioth," a place name, which would make Judas something unusual among the twelve — a Judean among Galileans. Others have read it differently. The point is not to settle the matter; it is to notice that even the name is a gap, and that the gaps around Judas are part of what makes him the piece that doesn't fit a simple story.

The garden scene itself is where the Gospels most clearly show their different minds. The same moment — Jesus in the garden before the arrest — is remembered differently by the different traditions, and the differences are worth looking at without trying to resolve them.

Mark gives us the distress. Jesus goes into the garden and tells the disciples to stay awake and pray. He takes Peter, James, and John a little further and tells them he is deeply distressed, even to death. He goes a little further on his own, falls on the ground, and prays that, if it is possible, the hour might pass from him. He returns and finds them sleeping. He goes back and prays again. He returns and finds them sleeping again. He goes back a third time, wakes them, and tells them the hour has come. The scene ends with the arrival of the arresting party.

This is the garden as Mark remembers it: a moment of human dread inside the larger story of what is coming. The reader should feel the weight of it. The man who has been proclaiming the kingdom, who has been healing and arguing and teaching with an authority that carried conviction, is now in a garden at night, deeply distressed, asking, in effect, whether there might be another way. The prayer is not weakness; it is the honest response of a human being to what is about to happen. The reader who has followed the book this far should understand that this is the same man we have been following — the same man who ate with the wrong people and argued with the Pharisees and redefined his family — and that the distress in the garden is the cost of the life he has been living.

Matthew adds the detail of an angel who strengthens him — a spiritualisation of the moment that belongs to Matthew's shaping of the story and that reflects the later community's instinct to make the suffering more theologically legible. Luke preserves the distress but adds the healing of the servant's ear after the sword, and Jesus' rebuke of the crowd. John gives a very different scene. In John, Jesus does not hide in the garden in distress. He steps forward when the arresting party arrives and asks them plainly whom they seek. They say "Jesus of Nazareth." He says "I am he." The effect is immediate: the disciples draw back and fall to the ground. Jesus tells them to let his disciples go. The

scene is one of composure, of Jesus identifying himself, taking command of the moment, and surrendering deliberately.

The two versions — the distressed Jesus who prays in the garden, and the composed Jesus who identifies himself — are not easily reconciled. They belong to different communities remembering the same night differently. What they share is the outline: the garden, the disciples, the arrival of the arresting party, and the moment when Jesus is taken. What they disagree on is the shape of the moment — whether it is one of dread, or one of composure, or something that we cannot fully reconstruct because the Gospels are shaped by different communities remembering different things.

The honest position is the one the reader has learned to carry by now: we don't know what the actual moment was like for the man who was arrested. We have two vivid and incompatible memories. We cannot choose between them and still be honest.

The sword comes next, and this is the moment where the disciples' response becomes visible.

One of the disciples uses a sword. The Synoptics place the action at the moment of the arrest: a disciple draws a sword and strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Luke adds the healing: Jesus touches the ear and heals it. Mark and Matthew record the rebuke — Jesus tells the disciple to put the sword away — but do not include the healing.

John is different. In John, the arrest scene in the garden (18:1–12) includes the sword strike: Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant, whom John names as Malchus (18:10–11). This happens inside the garden arrest scene, immediately after Jesus says "I am he" and before Jesus is bound (18:12). John names Peter and Malchus by name; the Synoptics do not name either. The ear is not healed in John — only Luke has the healing. The courtyard (18:15–27) is the setting of Peter's denial, not the sword.

This difference is worth noticing because it shows how the same event — a disciple swinging a sword during the arrest — has been remembered with different detail by different traditions. In the Synoptics, the sword strike is recorded at the moment of the arrest, as a desperate response to the moment; the disciple who swings it is unnamed. In John, the same sword strike is placed inside the garden scene and the disciple is named as Peter, the servant as Malchus, but the ear is not healed. Luke adds the healing, turning a moment of violence into a moment of mercy in a way not found in the other Gospels. The reader should understand that the healing detail belongs to Luke's shaping of the story, and should not assume that the healing happened as Luke describes it.

What the versions share is the basic outline: one disciple responded to the arrest with violence, and Jesus stopped him. The disciples were not expecting a nonviolent surrender. One of them drew a sword against the group that had come for Jesus. This is crucial for what it tells us about what the disciples thought they were facing. They did not read the night as the end of the movement. They read it as a moment when action was possible, and one of them acted. The arrest was not stopped by violence. It could not have been. The disciples were not the force that could have stopped it. The scene makes that obvious by showing what actually happened: one blow, one ear, one rebuke, and then the arrest was complete.

Jesus is taken. The disciples flee. Mark's sentence is the bluntest one in the Gospels' account of the arrest: "They all left him and fled." The movement, at this moment, dissolves into the separate runs of individual men. The prediction from the meal — the shepherd struck, the sheep scattered — is

fulfilled. The men who had followed him for the months or years of the public ministry are gone, each in his own direction.

The word "all" is worth pausing on, briefly. Mark says "they all left him and fled." The reader should notice what Mark is doing here, because it is the same pattern of honesty that runs through the book. Mark does not protect the disciples. Mark does not make them noble in their flight. Mark records that the entire group scattered. This is the kind of detail that would not have been invented by a later community trying to make its founders look good. The embarrassment principle works here as it worked at the baptism: the story that is awkward for the later tradition is often the story closest to what happened. The disciples ran. All of them. Mark says so, and the fact that Mark says so is part of what makes the scene dependable.

The arrest itself is straightforward from here. Jesus is taken into custody. The group that arrested him takes him to the high priest. The night continues. The garden is empty now.

Why a night arrest, and why this shape? The answer has been given in the details above, but it is worth stating plainly. The authorities wanted it quiet. They wanted to remove Jesus without a public confrontation in the city during Passover, when the streets were full of pilgrims and the political temperature was already high. A night arrest in a known garden outside the walls was a way to do that: it was quick (the group went directly to the place), it was manageable (the group had enough force to prevent resistance and had prepared for resistance), and it was away from the crowd (the arrest happened across the Kidron, not in the streets). By the time word could have spread, Jesus would already be in custody, and the movement's response would be limited by the dispersal of the disciples.

This is not the shape of a trial. It is the shape of a removal. The arrest is not the same thing as a legal process. The authorities move first to get Jesus into custody, and what happens next — the hearings, the questions, the transfer to Pilate — follows from that initial act of securing him. The arrest is the moment when the confrontation, already irreconcilable after the Temple action in the previous chapter, becomes final. The authorities have decided that Jesus cannot stay at large in Jerusalem at Passover, and they have acted on that decision in the way that best served their interests: quietly, at night, with enough force to make it stick, using an insider who knew where to find him.

It is worth laying out what we can say and what we cannot say about the arrest, because this is another moment where the tradition is thick and the history is thinner, and because the reader has learned to expect this kind of plain statement by now.

We can say the arrest happened in a garden at the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron from Jerusalem, a place Jesus often met with his disciples. We can say the arresting group included Temple authorities and Roman force, and that it carried weapons. We can say Judas led them there and used a signal to identify Jesus. We can say the disciples fled, and that the prediction of dispersal was fulfilled. We can say the arrest was a managed operation designed to avoid a public disturbance in the city during Passover, and that it involved Roman as well as Temple authority.

We cannot say exactly what was said in the garden before the arrest. We cannot say whether Jesus expected the arrest when he went to the garden, or whether the prediction at the meal was a form of foreknowledge or a form of sense. We cannot say with certainty which disciple swung the sword, beyond what the tradition says — Peter in John's Gospel, unnamed in the Synoptics. We cannot say whether the ear was healed, because that is only in Luke, and Luke may have shaped the detail. We

cannot say what the exact relationship was between the Temple police and the Roman cohort — whether the cohort was full or a detachment, whether the Romans initiated the arrest or were called in. We cannot say why Judas did what he did.

But we can say this, and it is the most important thing the chapter can say: the arrest was the moment the confrontation became irreversible. After the Temple action, the authorities were looking for a way to act. After the arrest, there was no way back. Jesus was in custody. The movement was scattered. The night was moving toward the hearings.

The next chapter is about what happened next: the high priest who interrogated him, the Roman prefect who would decide his fate, and what each of them was actually worried about. The trial narratives in the Gospels have been shaped by later concerns. The historical task is to read against that shaping and recover, as far as the sources allow, what each party had to gain and lose in the hours after the arrest.

The garden is empty now. The city behind the hill is holding its breath. The disciples have run in every direction. Jesus has been taken. The night is still young, and the hours ahead will be the ones that decide not just what happened to Jesus but what his movement would become.

The Hearings

The arrest is over and Jesus is in custody. The garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives is empty now, the disciples gone in every direction. Across the Kidron valley, behind the wall, Jerusalem is still holding its breath. The night that began at the arrest is moving into the city. The women who had followed him from Galilee — Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna, and the many others who had provided for the ministry out of their means (Luke 8:3) — were not with the men in the garden. Whether they were in Jerusalem during these hours, and where they were if they were, is not said by any source.

The hearings are the part of the story that is hardest to recover with confidence. The arrest was a managed operation, and the sources give us enough to reconstruct its shape. The hearings are different. The Gospels have shaped them for later audiences, and those audiences had reasons to shape them in particular ways. The historical task here is not to pick one version and declare it the true one. It is to read against the shaping, to recover what can be recovered, and to name plainly what cannot be known.

Jesus was taken from Gethsemane, across the Kidron valley, into Jerusalem. The Gospels all agree that he was brought to the high priest. Mark and Matthew name the place as the high priest's house. Luke adds that the elders, the officers, and the scribes were assembled. John gives a slightly different picture: first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, then to Caiaphas himself.

The high priest at the time was Caiaphas, who held the office from 18 to 36 CE, the same period as Pilate's governorship. The overlap is the arrangement on which the collaboration between the two authorities depended. The historian can date both men to the same period with confidence. We cannot say what Caiaphas thought of Jesus before the entry into Jerusalem, or what he was thinking when Jesus came to the Temple and acted there. The sources do not tell us, and the historian should not invent it.

What the historian can say is that the hearing before the high priest was the step that would lead to Roman action. The Jewish authorities could not execute anyone under Roman rule. The power of capital punishment belonged to Rome. A man who had to be removed by execution had to be handed over to the prefect. So the hearing before the high priest was not the final act. It was the step that would lead to the transfer to Pilate. The arrest had already removed Jesus from public view. The hearing was the next step, the one that would make the removal permanent.

If the hearing was the final act, it would be a trial with a verdict. But if the hearing was a step toward Roman action, it was something different: a hearing designed to produce a charge that would carry weight with the prefect. The authorities were not looking for a verdict in the Jewish court. They were looking for a basis to bring Jesus to Pilate, and to bring him in terms that would make the prefect act. The Gospels give us four versions of this hearing, and they differ. Mark has the chief priests and the whole council looking for testimony against Jesus, and the testimony failing to agree. The witnesses do not match. The narrative is built around the failure of the witnesses. Then the high priest stands up and asks the direct question: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" And Jesus answers: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." The high priest tears his clothes and cries out: "What further testimony do we need? You have heard his blasphemy." And the verdict is death.

Matthew follows Mark but adds the detail of false witnesses. Luke changes the scene: Jesus is questioned about his disciples and his teaching, he answers that he has spoken openly, and an officer strikes him on the cheek. John sends Jesus first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, with a similar question about disciples and teaching.

The versions share the outline: Jesus is brought before the high priest, the question is about who he is, and the answer leads to a verdict. They disagree on the shape of the question, the nature of the charge, and the role of the answer in producing the verdict. The honest position is the one the reader has learned to carry. We don't know exactly what was said in this hearing. We have different versions from different traditions, and we cannot choose between them and still be honest.

The Son of Man saying. The most secure element in the hearing before the high priest is probably the Son of Man saying in Mark 14:62: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." This is the element most likely to be close to what happened. It uses the title Son of Man, the one Jesus seems to have used of himself, drawn from Daniel 7, and it connects to the apocalyptic frame the sources attribute to him. The reader who has followed the book this far should understand that this is the same man who proclaimed the kingdom and enacted it in healings and exorcisms and ate with the wrong people at the table. That is the man in the hearing. He is the man who, in the key moment, says something about the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds.

The Son of Man saying also gives us the charge that made the hearing move in the direction it moved. If Jesus said something like this, then the hearing before the high priest was not just a formal procedure. It was the moment when Jesus' words forced the issue, when the question of who he was became the question that had to be answered, and when the answer was the one that led to the verdict. The high priest understood what Jesus had said. That is what the tearing of the clothes means. The high priest understood that Jesus had said something that, in the terms of the Jewish world, was a direct claim, and that was the thing that made the hearing move toward the verdict.

The verdict. In Mark, the verdict is death. "You have heard his blasphemy." The council condemns him. In the other Gospels, the verdict is the same in outline: Jesus is handed over to be destroyed, and the next step is to bring him to Pilate. What the verdict meant is important here. The council could not execute Jesus. The power of capital punishment belonged to Rome. So the verdict, in the Jewish hearing, was not the final act. It was the basis for the transfer to Pilate. The council condemned him, and then they handed him over to the prefect, and the prefect would decide.

This is the sequence. The hearing before the high priest gave the council a verdict. The transfer to Pilate gave the prefect the chance to decide. The decision of the prefect was the thing that made the whole business irreversible in the way that actually mattered. The council could not execute. Only the Roman prefect could.

The transfer. Jesus was taken from the high priest's house to Pilate. The Gospels give us four versions of this hearing as well.

Mark has Jesus brought to Pilate in the morning, with the chief priests accusing him of many things. Pilate asks Jesus whether he is the king of the Jews. Jesus answers: "You say so." Pilate seems impressed by Jesus' silence. But the chief priests accuse him further, and the scene moves toward the crowd choosing Barabbas over Jesus, and Pilate going along with the crowd.

Matthew follows Mark closely, but adds the detail of Pilate's wife's dream and the crowd choosing Barabbas. Pilate seems reluctant. His wife had a dream, and the dream warned him about Jesus. But the crowd's choice overrides that, and Pilate washes his hands, saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood." The crowd answers: "His blood be on us and on our children."

Luke has a different scene. Jesus is brought to Pilate, but the charge is different: he is accused of misleading the nation, forbidding the payment of taxes, and calling himself a king. Pilate declares Jesus innocent multiple times. Then Pilate hears that Jesus is a Galilean, and sends him to Herod, who is in Jerusalem for the festival. Herod asks Jesus many questions, but Jesus says nothing. Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus, and send him back to Pilate. Pilate then calls the chief priests and the people together and says he has found no crime in Jesus. But the crowd demands Barabbas, and Pilate gives in.

John has a different scene again. Jesus is brought to Pilate, but the questioning is different. Pilate goes in and out of the praetorium, speaking with the chief priests outside and with Jesus inside. The charge is about being a king. Pilate asks Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answers: "My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, my followers would have fought." Pilate asks: "So you are a king?" Jesus answers: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." Pilate asks: "What is truth?" And then Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd, saying: "Behold the man!" And the chief priests ask for Barabbas, and the crowd demands Jesus' crucifixion.

The differences matter. They are not just variations on a single event. They are different versions of what the hearing was about and what Pilate thought.

What the versions share is the outline: Jesus is brought before Pilate, the question is about whether he is a king, and Pilate's decision leads to the crucifixion. What they disagree on is the shape of the hearing, the role of the crowd, the declarations of innocence, and the role of Herod. The honest position is the one the reader has learned to carry by now. We don't know exactly what was said in

the hearing before Pilate. We have different versions from different traditions, and we cannot choose between them and still be honest.

Pilate. What do we know about Pilate, apart from the Gospels' versions of the trial? The historian knows him from Philo and Josephus, and the picture is not the picture of a reluctant noble who was pressured into acting against his better judgment. Philo describes Pilate as corrupt, brutal, and inflexible, a man who was angry and infuriating to the Jewish population. Josephus describes him as a man who provoked trouble. He brought the Roman standards into Jerusalem at night, provoking a protest. He used temple funds to build an aqueduct, provoking a riot. He responded with violence. These are not the actions of a man who was naturally inclined to be gentle with the Jewish population. They are the actions of a man who was inflexible and who provoked the very trouble he was supposed to prevent.

The Gospels' versions of Pilate are different from this picture. In the Gospels, Pilate is reluctant, hesitant, even sympathetic. He declares Jesus innocent multiple times. He tries to release Jesus. He washes his hands of the matter. In the Gospels, Pilate is not the villain. The villains are the chief priests and the crowd.

The difference between the historical picture and the Gospel picture is itself informative. It tells us something about the communities that produced the Gospels and the concerns that shaped them. The early church was spreading into the Roman empire. The Romans were not the enemies of the church. The story of Jesus' execution could not be a story in which the Romans were simply the villains. The Gospels' versions of Pilate reflect the needs of communities that were living inside the empire and that needed to make sense of the Roman role in the story.

The historical position is that we don't know what Pilate thought of Jesus when he was brought to him. We know that Pilate was the prefect of Judea, and that he had the power to crucify, and that he used that power on others. We know that he was in Jerusalem for Passover with his troops, and that he was worried about order. We know that the authorities brought Jesus to him, and that they brought him with a charge. We know that Pilate's decision led to the crucifixion. But we don't know what Pilate thought, or why he decided as he did.

The charge. The question of the charge is the question at the centre of the hearings. The Gospels give us different versions of the charge. In some accounts, it is about blasphemy. In others, it is about being a king. In others, it is about misleading the people. The question is whether the charge was sufficient to make Pilate act, and the answer depends on what the charge was and how Pilate understood it.

The historical position is that the charge was probably about being a king or a political threat, because that is the kind of charge that would make Pilate act. The authorities knew that Pilate was interested in political threats, and they knew that blasphemy was not sufficient. The Jewish authorities could condemn Jesus for blasphemy in their own hearing. But to get Pilate to act, they needed a charge that would matter to the Roman prefect: a charge that would make Pilate see Jesus as a threat to order, not as a religious figure. So they framed the charge in a way that would make Pilate act, and the Gospels give us different versions of how that framing happened.

This is the uncomfortable part of the story, and it is worth sitting with. The authorities in Jerusalem brought Jesus to Pilate, and they brought him with a charge that would make Pilate act. The charge was political, about being a king or a threat to order, and the authorities knew that this was the kind

of charge that would make the prefect act. They could not execute Jesus themselves. They needed Roman action. And they got it.

What each party had to gain and lose. The hearing before the high priest was about securing the charge that would go to Pilate. The hearing before Pilate was about making the Roman decision. The high priest had to gain the removal of Jesus from Jerusalem at Passover. He had to lose if the removal caused a riot, or if it failed, or if it damaged the Temple's relationship with Rome. The arrest had already removed Jesus from public view. The hearings were the next step, the one that would make the removal permanent.

Pilate had to gain the maintenance of order in a city at maximum tension. He had to lose if the situation escalated into a riot. He needed to know whether Jesus was a political threat or a religious figure, and whether the charge from the authorities was sufficient to make him act. He was in Jerusalem for Passover with his troops, and his concern was the crowd.

This is the frame of the hearings. The high priest was trying to move Jesus to Pilate. Pilate was trying to assess whether to act. The charge was the bridge between the two. And the bridge was built in political terms, because that was the only language that Pilate would act on.

The Gospels' versions of this frame are shaped by the later concerns of the communities that produced them. In the Gospels, the responsibility is spread out: to the crowd, to the chief priests, to the people whose choices led to the execution. The crowd chooses Barabbas. The chief priests accuse Jesus. The people cry out for his blood. The Gospels spread the responsibility because the story they are telling cannot put it all on the Romans, or all on the Jewish authorities, or all on the crowd. The story they are telling needs to make sense of the execution in a way that the communities telling it can live with.

The historical reality is different. The high priest brought Jesus to Pilate with a charge. Pilate decided to crucify. The decision was Roman. The execution was Roman. The charge that made it happen was the one the authorities in Jerusalem built and brought to the prefect. The crowding, the hand-washing, the dreams, the reluctances: these are the later shaping, not the bare fact of what happened.

What we can say and what we cannot say. We can say that the hearings happened, and that they led to the transfer to Pilate, and that Pilate's decision led to the crucifixion. We can say that the high priest was Caiaphas, and that Pilate was the prefect of Judea, and that the collaboration between them was the arrangement on which the suppression of local trouble depended. We can say that the charge was probably about being a king or a political threat, and that the Gospels' versions of the trial are shaped by the concerns of the communities that produced them.

We cannot say exactly what was said in the hearings. We cannot say whether the Sanhedrin as we imagine it existed in this form at this time, or whether the night setting of the trial is historical or shaped by later concerns. We cannot say exactly what Jesus said, beyond the outline that the Gospels give us. We cannot say whether Pilate believed the charges, or whether he was reluctant, or whether the crowd was involved in the way the Gospels describe. We cannot say precisely why Pilate decided as he did.

But we can say this, and it is the most important thing the chapter can say. The hearings are the part of the story where the confrontation becomes fatal. The arrest got Jesus into custody. The hearings got him to Pilate. Pilate's decision was the thing that made it irreversible in the way that mattered.

The decision to crucify was a Roman decision, and it was the Roman decision that the Jewish authorities could not make themselves.

The hearings are also the part of the story where the later tradition has shaped the narrative most heavily. The Gospels' versions of the trial are not just reports of what happened. They are arguments, in some sense, about what the story means and who is responsible for it. The historian's task is to read against that shaping, to recover what can be recovered, and to name what cannot be known.

The next chapter is about what comes after the hearings. The decision has been made. The sentence has been passed. The next chapter is about the cross.

The Cross

The sentence has been passed. The decision has been made. Jesus is led out of the city, toward the place where the Romans executed people who had become a problem.

Chapter 3 introduced crucifixion as an instrument of Roman policy: the method Rome used on bandits and rebels and slaves and anyone who made trouble for the order they maintained. Chapter 25 gave the reader the hearings, the two men at the centre of them, what each was worried about, and the charge that carried the day. The decision was Roman. The execution was Roman. The charge was the bridge between the Jewish authorities and the prefect, and the bridge was built in political language because that was the only language Pilate would act on.

Now the machinery runs to its end. This chapter describes what crucifixion was, what it did, and what happened to the man who was put on it. The book does not look away. It does not aestheticise. It reports.

Crucifixion was not a quick death. It was designed to be slow, public, and humiliating. The condemned person was beaten, stripped, made to carry the crossbeam to the place of execution, and fixed to it in a way that made standing impossible and breathing a struggle. The body hung in public view, exposed to the crowd, to the soldiers, to anyone passing by. Death came by a combination of exhaustion, asphyxiation, shock, and exposure, and it could take days. The point of the method was not merely to end a life but to display the consequences of crossing Roman authority: the body itself was the message.

The embarrassment principle, used before in this book, applies here with unusual force. The stories about Jesus do not cover up the shame. They put it at the centre. A Messiah who was crucified was a contradiction in the terms of the world the Gospels come from. The fact that the tradition carries this contradiction is itself evidence that the story is close to what happened.

The sentence was passed, and then the sentence was carried out. What happened between the hearing and the hill is described differently by the different Gospels, and the differences are worth noticing.

Mark and Matthew have Jesus led away after the judgment, to be crucified. Luke adds the crowd: people who knew what was happening, sorrowful and following. John has Pilate present Jesus with the words "Behold the man," after which Jesus is led away. The Synoptics describe the mockery: a crown of thorns, a purple robe, the soldiers playing at kingship before the real thing begins. Luke has Jesus say to the women of Jerusalem: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." The Gospels have shaped these scenes for their own purposes.

Mark and Matthew shape the mockery for its irony: the soldiers make a parody of the kingship that Pilate has just asked about. Luke shapes the scene for its sorrow. John shapes the scene for its declaration: "Behold the man."

What the versions share is the outline. Jesus was led away, mocked, and walked toward the place of execution. The man who had been brought to Pilate was now being taken to the place where the sentence would be made visible.

The place was called Golgotha — Aramaic for "place of the skull." Mark gives the name in Aramaic and adds the explanation; Matthew follows Mark. Luke and John do not name it directly. The location was outside the walls, chosen for visibility to the city: a public execution needed a public place.

The shape of the hill is not described in detail. The name, "place of the skull," has given later tradition a lot of material to work with, but the Gospels do not elaborate.

The crucifixion itself is described with a mixture of detail and silence in the Gospels, and the silence is as important as the detail. The Gospels do not give a medical account. They give the story of what happened in terms that a first-century reader would understand and that a later community would carry.

The man was put on the cross. The Gospels are not consistent about the mechanics. Mark and Matthew say that Jesus was crucified between two others, one on each side. Luke says the two others were criminals, one on each side. John says Jesus was placed in the middle, with the two others on either side. This is the familiar image: three crosses, the middle one larger, the one in the centre the focus. The reader should understand that the image is familiar because the tradition has shaped it, and that the exact arrangement is not recoverable. What we can say is that Jesus was crucified with others, and that the others were apparently men who had been condemned alongside him.

The method of fixing the body to the cross varied in the Roman world. The traditional picture, popularised later, is of nails through the wrists or hands and feet. The historical reality was more varied: some victims were tied, some were nailed, some were impaled. The Gospels do not specify, except to mention nails in the later story of the resurrection, when Thomas will ask to see the marks. The mention of nails in that context is part of the resurrection tradition, not a detailed account of the crucifixion itself. The reader should understand that the body was fixed to the cross in a way that made standing impossible, and that the traditional image of nails is one reading of the evidence, not a secured fact about the method.

The position on the cross made breathing a struggle. The weight of the body pulled on the arms and chest; the victim had to push up on the feet to draw a full breath. The method was slow because the body would tire, the breathing would shallow, and death came as the body gave up.

The Gospels describe some of the details of the scene. The soldiers divided his clothes, casting lots for them. This is the detail that Mark, Matthew, and John all include, each in slightly different form. The dividing of the clothes is the ordinary detail of a crucifixion, the thing the soldiers did as part of the execution. It is also the thing that the tradition remembers because of the Psalms, because the passers-by and the religious leaders mocked him, and because the scene is full of small details that make it real. The reader should understand that the kind of detail that grounds the story: the man on

the cross is being stripped of his clothes by the soldiers who killed him, and the tradition remembers it.

The charge was posted. John says that the notice was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek, and that it read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests objected: "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered: "What I have written, I have written." The reader should understand that the political meaning of the cross made public. Pilate's notice said what the execution meant: this man was a king, in the sense that mattered to Rome. The religious authorities wanted the wording changed; Pilate refused. The cross carried the charge that had been made at the hearing. The method of execution and the posting of the charge were part of the same act: the sentence was being made visible to everyone.

The scene on the hill is where the Gospels most clearly show what the crucifixion meant. The authorities, the passers-by, and the religious leaders all mocked him. The man on the cross was tested by the same kind of offer that had been tested in the wilderness: come down from the cross, and we will believe you. The man who had been declared God's Son, who had been proclaimed king in a way that offended the authorities, who had said that the kingdom was near, was now hanging in public view while the people around him asked him to prove himself by saving himself.

The mocking is preserved with a frankness that the embarrassment principle makes dependable. The church that carried these stories did not invent a noble death that flattered the movement. It carried the story of a death in which Jesus was mocked, rejected, and humiliated. These are the details that would have been hard for the later tradition to invent, and they are the details that make the story hard to explain away.

The words from the cross are given differently by the different Gospels, and the differences are themselves informative. Mark and Matthew preserve the cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Luke has Jesus say: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." John has Jesus say: "It is finished." These are different words, preserved in different traditions; we cannot choose among them. The honest position is that we don't know exactly what Jesus said, or whether he said anything at all. The Gospels give us words; the words are the words of the communities that carried them.

Luke's version is gentler — a prayer of trust. John's is the most theological: "It is finished" as completion. The death itself follows the same pattern: different traditions, different shaping.

The soldiers checked the death. John adds the detail that the soldiers broke the legs of the two others, but that when they came to Jesus they saw that he was already dead, and did not break his legs. John connects this to the Passover scripture: not a bone of the lamb shall be broken. The reader should understand that a detail placed in the story to connect the death to the Passover scripture, and that it may not be a secured historical detail. What we can say is that the death was verified by the soldiers, and that the body was then taken down.

The women were there. Mark names those who watched from a distance: Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, who had followed him in Galilee and provided for him out of their means. The men had fled. The women stayed. The tradition would not have invented women at the execution; the embarrassment principle, applied as it was at the baptism and arrest, makes this detail one of the more secure things in the story.

The body was taken down. Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body. Mark says Joseph was a member of the council, a man who had not agreed with the decision, and who was waiting for the kingdom of God. John says Joseph was a disciple, but secretly, out of fear of the Jews. Luke says Joseph was a good and righteous man, a member of the council, who had not agreed with the plan. The Gospels give different versions of who Joseph was, but they agree on what he did: he asked for the body, he took it down, and he buried it.

The burial is described in different terms. Mark and Matthew say the body was wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a tomb cut out of rock, a tomb that had never been used. Luke says the same. John adds the detail that the tomb was near the place of the crucifixion, and that Joseph was helped by Nicodemus, who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. What we can say is that Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried, and that the burial is part of the story the Gospels carry.

What we can say and what we cannot say. We can say that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, outside the walls of Jerusalem, at a place called Golgotha, between two others, and that the charge posted above him was "King of the Jews" in some form. We can say that the crucifixion was a public execution, designed to humiliate and deter, and that the body was displayed and the clothes were divided and the charge was posted in the sight of the city. We can say that the women who had followed him from Galilee were present and watched from a distance. We can say that Joseph of Arimathea took the body down and buried it in a tomb cut out of rock. We can say that the method was Roman, the decision was Roman, and the execution was Roman.

We cannot say exactly what Jesus said on the cross, or whether he said anything. We cannot say exactly how long the crucifixion took, or what the soldiers did beyond what the Gospels describe. We cannot say whether the nails were driven through the wrists or the hands or whether the body was tied, because the Gospels do not specify in a way we can verify. We cannot say whether the dying words in Mark and Matthew are the exact words he spoke, or whether the prayer in Luke is the exact word, or whether the word "It is finished" in John is the exact word. We cannot say exactly who Joseph of Arimathea was, beyond what the Gospels say. We cannot say whether the body was buried in haste or in dignity, because the Gospels give different versions of what happened.

But we can say this, and it is the most important thing the chapter can say. The cross was a real death. The method was real. The humiliation was real. The shame was real. The man who had proclaimed the kingdom and enacted it and argued for it and eaten with the wrong people was put on a cross in the sight of Jerusalem at Passover, and he died there. This is the thing the book has been building toward, and this is the thing that the tradition carries, and this is the thing that the reader should understand without looking away.

The cross was also the thing that made the story hard to explain. A crucified Messiah was a contradiction. The man who had been declared God's Son was put to death in the most shameful way available. The movement that had followed him was scattered and terrified. The women who had followed him watched from a distance and saw it happen. The man who had said the kingdom was near died as if the kingdom had not come.

This is the contradiction that the book has been building toward, and this is the thing that the next chapter will sit with. The next chapter is about the Sabbath that followed. The day of silence. The day of waiting. The day that came between the death and whatever came next.

The sun went down over Jerusalem. The day of Passover ended. The Sabbath began. The hill of Golgotha outside the walls was quiet. The cross was empty, or would be by morning. The body was in the tomb. The city was at rest. The movement was scattered. The women had watched from a distance and then gone home. The men had fled and were in hiding. The Sabbath had begun, and the next day would be the first day of the week, and the tomb would be found empty, and the story would change in a way that the book will come to.

But that is the next chapter. This chapter ends with the cross. The man who had been proclaimed Son and king and Messiah was dead on a Roman cross, outside the walls of Jerusalem, in the sight of the city, in the middle of the Passover festival. The sentence had been passed. The sentence had been carried out. The machinery of Rome had done its work. The man from Nazareth was dead.

The next chapter is about the silence that followed. The Saturday. The day when nothing happened, and everything was waiting.

Sabbath

The sun went down over Jerusalem on Friday. The bodies of the three men on the crosses at Golgotha were taken down before the Sabbath began, because the Jewish law forbade a body remaining on a tree through the night of the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea had asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, and Pilate had agreed. The body had been wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a tomb cut from rock, a tomb that had been used for no one else, and the stone had been rolled across the entrance. The work had been finished as the Sabbath began. The Sabbath did not wait for the details to settle. The Sabbath arrived.

The chapter before this one ended with the cross. This chapter begins with the day that followed. It is the day of silence. The day of waiting. The day that came between the death and whatever came next. The chapter does not describe the resurrection. It does not describe appearances. It describes the Sabbath itself — the real Saturday that followed a real Friday, when a real man was dead, and the people who had followed him were scattered and terrified, and one day ended and another began in the sight of God, and nothing happened.

The Sabbath is the weekly day of rest in the Jewish tradition. It is the day that interrupts the week and says that the week belongs to God, that human work is not the final word, that there is something in the world that is not ours to keep making. It begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. It is a day of cessation — no work, no cooking, no carrying, no normal business. In Jerusalem at Passover, the Sabbath was not the ordinary Sabbath. It was the Sabbath that fell inside the festival, and that meant the city was already full of pilgrims who had come for the Passover, and the Sabbath layered itself on top of the festival, and the combination made the city quieter than it was already going to be, and more tense.

A reader who is not Jewish may not feel the weight of the Sabbath in the way the people in Jerusalem felt it. The reader who is Jewish knows what the Sabbath is without being told. For everyone else, it is worth saying what the Sabbath was in this context: a day on which the ordinary rhythm of the city stopped. The markets closed. The streets thinned. The Temple stood but the festival's public business was interrupted. The Sabbath carried its own authority, separate from the festival, and it imposed its

own demand for rest on people who were already under pressure from the festival, from the pilgrims, from the Roman troops on the porticoes, from the recent events.

The day after the crucifixion was that Sabbath. The people who had been in Jerusalem for the Passover were observing the Sabbath at the same time as they were living through the consequences of what had happened two days earlier. The entry into Jerusalem had been on a Sunday, at the beginning of the week. The Temple action had followed. But the arrest had come at night, after the meal on Thursday. The hearings had happened in the night and the early morning. The crucifixion had been on Friday. Now the Sabbath had arrived, and with it the end of the day and the beginning of the rest.

The Sabbath is a day of rest, but it is not a day of forgetting. It is a day of stopping, and the stopping is itself a kind of attention. The Sabbath makes space. The Sabbath says: cease. The Sabbath does not say what will happen after the ceasing. It only says that for one day the making must stop. The Jewish people who were in Jerusalem for the Passover and who were also keeping the Sabbath were living inside two rhythms at once — the rhythm of the festival, which pointed backward to the Exodus and forward to the hope of liberation, and the rhythm of the Sabbath, which marked the week as belonging to God and required the cessation of work. Both rhythms were real. Both were being kept. And both were happening at the same time as the aftermath of the crucifixion was settling over the city.

The women who had followed Jesus from Galilee were present at the cross. Mark names them: Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, who had followed him in Galilee and provided for him out of their means. Luke and John name some of the same women and add others. The women had watched the crucifixion from a distance and then gone home, or to the home of someone they knew, before the Sabbath began. The Gospels are not interested in precisely where they were during the long hours of Friday evening and Saturday. The silence of the sources here is the silence of a day that the tradition did not fill in. The chapter does not fill it in either. The reader should know that the women who had been at the cross were somewhere in Jerusalem, keeping the Sabbath, and that the tradition does not tell us where, or what they said to each other, or what they thought about what they had seen. We don't know.

The men had fled. The arrest in the garden had scattered them. The Gospels say that at the arrest they all left him and fled. Mark says this plainly. The reader has learned the embarrassment principle in this book: a story that the later church would not have invented is often the one closest to what happened. The dispersal of the disciples at the arrest is a story the church would not have invented, because it makes the followers look weak and afraid at the moment when they should look faithful. The fact that the tradition carries it is itself evidence that it happened. So the men were in hiding in Jerusalem, or had fled the city, or were in some combination of hiding and fleeing, and the Sabbath found them scattered. We don't know where each one was. We can say that they were not together. We can say that the band that had followed Jesus in Galilee and around the lake and in Jerusalem had been broken by the arrest and the crucifixion, and that the Sabbath came on a movement that was dispersed and terrified.

The movement was over. That is the honest thing to say. The public work of Jesus in Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem had ended with the crucifixion. The teaching, the healings, the arguments with the Pharisees, the meals with the wrong people, the entry into Jerusalem, the Temple action, the

arrest, the hearings, the cross — all of it was complete. The man who had done it was dead. The people who had followed him were scattered. There was no public movement left to continue the work. The Sabbath fell on a movement that had ended.

What this means for the people who had followed him is not easy to reconstruct, but it can be described. The followers of Jesus had been persuaded, over the course of a year or two, that something important was happening in and through this man. They had heard him proclaim the kingdom. They had seen the healings and the exorcisms. They had eaten at his table. They had heard the arguments. Some of them had been with him in the garden. Some of them had fled. Some of them had stood at the cross. Some of them had gone home. The kingdom had not come in the way they may have expected it to come. The man who had proclaimed it was dead on a Roman cross. The movement had been crushed by the authorities and the Roman force. The Sabbath was a day on which the followers of Jesus had nothing to do and everything to process, and the processing was not something that could be done in public.

Jerusalem at the Sabbath was quiet. The Sabbath was quiet by its nature. But the Sabbath that followed the crucifixion was also quiet because the city had gone through a week of high tension and now the Sabbath imposed a stop. Whatever the Roman soldiers on the porticoes were thinking, they were observing the Sabbath in the sense that the Romans observed the Jewish Sabbath when they were in Jerusalem — with respect, with caution, with the understanding that a disturbance during the Sabbath would be a disturbance of the wrong kind and at the wrong time. Pilate, the prefect, was in the city for the festival, and his concern during the Sabbath would have been the maintenance of order without provocation. The man he had crucified was in a tomb. The charge had been posted. The sentence had been carried out. The machinery had run its course. The Sabbath gave the city a day of rest from the immediate crisis, even if the crisis had not been fully resolved in any sense the people could recognise.

The high priest Caiaphas had achieved what he set out to achieve. Jesus had been removed. The Temple action had been answered. The man who had caused a disturbance at the Temple during the festival had been arrested, heard, and executed by the Roman authority on a charge that the Jewish authorities had built and brought. The Sabbath was the day on which the result stood. There was no public demonstration in progress. There was no crowd shouting. There was no man in the Temple. There was only the quiet of the Sabbath and the knowledge that something had happened and been finished.

The reader should not think that the authorities were celebrating. The Sabbath was not a day of celebration. It was a day of rest, and it was also a day that imposed its own solemnity. The authorities in Jerusalem had done what they had done in order to keep order, and order had been kept. But the keeping of order on the Sabbath was the keeping of a day that was already defined by its own demands, and the Sabbath itself was a sign that the world was not only the world of Roman order and Temple authority. The Sabbath was a sign of a different rhythm, a different claim on time. It is worth noticing that the chapter does not reduce the Sabbath to a footnote in the story of the crucifixion. The Sabbath is the Sabbath. It is the day that was kept by the people who kept it, for their own reasons, for their own God, on a day that happened to follow the death of a man who had been killed by the authorities.

The tomb was sealed. The stone was rolled across the entrance. The body was inside. The Sabbath was being kept. The women who had watched from a distance had gone where they could keep the Sabbath. The men who had fled were in hiding. The city was quiet. The Roman soldiers on the porticoes were doing what soldiers did on a Sabbath in a city at festival — watching, staying alert, not provoking, resting in their own way. The day moved on.

The day was a real day. The Sabbath of that Saturday was a real day in the life of Jerusalem and a real day in the life of the people who had followed Jesus. It was not a gap in the story that existed for the reader's convenience. It was a day that happened. A day of rest. A day of waiting. A day on which nothing happened and everything was waiting.

The waiting was not empty. The followers of Jesus were waiting without knowing what they were waiting for. The women who had been at the cross were waiting without knowing whether they would go to the tomb on the next day. The men who had fled were waiting without knowing whether they would come out of hiding. The Sabbath was a day on which the future was not yet available, and the present was the only thing there was, and the present was a day of rest in a city that had just seen a man killed.

The chapter does not say what the followers were thinking. The sources do not say, and the chapter should not invent it. The reader should understand that the followers were afraid. The arrest had terrified them. The crucifixion had devastated them. The Sabbath was a day on which the fear had nowhere to go, because the day imposed rest on the fear as it imposed rest on everything else. The fear was still there. It just had to wait.

The Sabbath ended at sunset on Saturday. The day was over. The first day of the week was coming. The tomb was still sealed. The body was still inside. The women were still where they were. The men were still where they were. The city was still quiet. Nothing had changed. Everything was waiting.

But that is the end of the chapter. This chapter is about the Sabbath. The Sabbath is over. The next chapter is about what came after the Sabbath. The chapter does not describe the resurrection. It does not describe the women going to the tomb. It does not describe the empty tomb. It ends with the Sabbath itself, the real Saturday that followed the real Friday, when the man was dead, and the followers were scattered and terrified, and the city was quiet, and the day ended as days end, and the next day was coming.

Part Six: After

Something Happened

The sun went down over Jerusalem on Saturday. The Sabbath ended. The first day of the week was coming. The tomb was still sealed. The body was still inside. The women were still where they were. The men were still where they were. The city was still quiet.

And then the story changed.

This chapter is about the change. It is about the empty tomb traditions, the appearance reports, and Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 15 as our earliest testimony. It is about the range of historical explanations, laid out without choosing. The chapter does not conclude. The chapter does not resolve. The chapter does what the book has done at every point where the sources leave room: it tells the reader what the sources say, what they don't say, and what the honest position is in the gap.

The temptation to conclude will be enormous. The reader who has followed this book this far has been brought to the edge of the most consequential claim in the history of the Christian church, and the claim is this: that on the first day of the week, the tomb was empty, and the man who had been dead was alive. The reader who is a Christian has a position on this. The reader who is not does not. The chapter is written for both, and for the reader who is unsure. It does not ask either to surrender what they hold. It asks the reader to understand what the sources are and what they are not.

The earliest written testimony we have about the resurrection is not a Gospel. It is a letter. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a church in Corinth in the mid-50s CE, roughly twenty-five years after the crucifixion, and in 1 Corinthians 15 he gives us a passage that has shaped the history of Christian belief ever since.

Paul writes that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred at one time, then to James, then to all the apostles, and then to Paul himself. Paul says he received this tradition and delivered it, and that if the resurrection did not happen then the faith is futile and the believers are still in their sins.

This is not a polished narrative. It is an early statement of what the community believed had happened. It names names. It names Peter (Cephas), the twelve, a large group of five hundred, James, and Paul. It is the earliest account we have, and it is earlier than any of the Gospels. It matters because it establishes that within a generation of the crucifixion, the believers were asserting that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that they were grounding that assertion in claims of appearances to specific people.

The reader should understand what this passage does and does not do. It does not give a detailed narrative of the empty tomb. It does not describe a particular morning at a particular garden. It does not reconcile itself with any Gospel account. It gives a summary statement of the belief, with named witnesses, and it asserts that the belief is the foundation of everything that follows.

What Paul does not say is also informative. He does not describe the women at the tomb. He does not describe the angels or the young man or the earthquake or the rolled-back stone. The tradition Paul knew was apparently not centred on the empty tomb story as it appears in the Gospels. Whether the empty tomb story existed in Paul's time or whether it developed later is a question the sources do not settle. What Paul does is assert the resurrection itself and the appearances that gave the believers confidence in it.

The empty tomb story appears in all four Gospels, and it appears in different forms. The reader has learned by now that differences between the Gospels are not defects. They are information. The different versions of the empty tomb tell us something about how the story was carried and shaped.

Mark, the earliest Gospel, gives us the simplest version. The women go to the tomb early on the first day of the week, bringing spices to anoint the body. They find the stone rolled away. They go in and do not find the body. They see a young man in a white robe sitting inside, and he says: "Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." The women flee, trembling and bewildered, and say nothing to anyone, because they are afraid.

That is where Mark ends, in the original text. The women are afraid, they say nothing, and the story stops. Later manuscripts add a longer ending to Mark — appearances, the disciples going to Galilee, the Great Commission — but the earliest and most reliable manuscripts end at that frightened silence. The reader should hold that. The earliest Gospel carries the story of the empty tomb as a story of a discovery that produced terror and silence, not an immediate triumph.

Matthew gives us a more developed version. The women go to the tomb, and there is an earthquake, and an angel of the Lord descends, and the stone is rolled back. The angel speaks to the women, and they leave with joy and run to tell the disciples. On the way, Jesus himself meets them and they cling to his feet and worship him. The guard at the tomb — a detail in Matthew not found in the other Gospels — becomes part of the story, and the guard's report is said to be the origin of the claim that the disciples stole the body. Matthew shapes the scene for its finality and its instruction: the resurrection is real, and the authorities had tried to cover it up.

Luke gives a different version again. The women go to the tomb at dawn, and they find the stone rolled away. They go in and do not find the body. While they are puzzling over this, two men in dazzling clothes appear and say: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has been raised." The women remember his words, return and tell the eleven, and the men do not believe them at first. Peter runs to the tomb and sees the linen cloths by themselves. Luke's version has two angels rather than one, and it has Peter's independent verification.

John gives the most detailed and the most individual version. Mary of Magdala goes to the tomb alone, early in the morning, and sees the stone taken away. She goes and tells Peter and the other disciple, who run to the tomb. The other disciple arrives first, looks in, sees the linen cloths, goes in, and believes — though he does not yet understand. Mary remains at the tomb, weeping, and then sees two angels, and then sees Jesus, and mistakes him for the gardener, and then recognizes him when he says her name. John's version is the only one in which Mary is alone at the tomb first. It is the only one in which the risen Jesus speaks her name and she recognizes him. It is the most personal of the versions, and it gives Mary of Magdala a role that the other Gospels do not give her.

These are not the same story told four times. They are four accounts that share a common frame — the women go to the tomb, the tomb is empty, something happens that the women experience and report — and that diverge in the details. The reader should understand that the frame is the more secure element and the details are the ones the communities shaped for their own purposes. The common frame is: the tomb was found empty on the first day of the week, and the discovery was made by the women who had been at the cross.

The embarrassment principle applies here too. A story in which women are the first witnesses of the resurrection is a story the later church would not have invented, because women's testimony was not held as authoritative in the world the Gospels come from. The fact that all four Gospels preserve women as the discoverers of the empty tomb is itself evidence that this element is close to what was remembered. The later tradition would have given the first witness to Peter, or to a man, or to the twelve. It did not. The women are there in all four accounts.

The appearance reports are the second cluster of resurrection traditions, and they are the ones that Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 15 preserves earliest.

Paul's list names appearances to Peter, to the twelve, to a group of more than five hundred, to James, and to Paul. The Gospels add more detail. Luke gives the appearance on the road to Emmaus, in which the risen Jesus walks with two disciples and is only recognised when he breaks the bread. Luke also gives the appearance to the eleven in Jerusalem, in which Jesus eats a piece of fish to show that he is not a ghost. John gives the appearance to Mary of Magdala, the appearance to the disciples behind locked doors, the appearance a week later when Thomas is present, and the appearance by the Sea of Tiberias in which the risen Jesus shares a breakfast of fish with the disciples and restores Peter. Matthew gives the mountain in Galilee, the Great Commission, and the promise that Jesus will be with the disciples always.

These appearance traditions are layered. They are not a single account. They are memories and interpretations built on memories, and they have been shaped by different communities for different reasons. The reader should understand that what we have are appearance traditions, not a single appearance narrative, and that the differences between them are the differences between communities remembering the same basic claim in different ways.

The appearance to Peter is the most secure, because it is named in Paul's earliest list, in Luke's Gospel, and in the oral tradition that underlies John. Peter is the one Jesus specially appoints, even after the denial. The restoration of Peter is the thread that runs through the resurrection appearances and into the early community: the man who denied Jesus is the man who receives the first appearance, and the man who becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church.

The appearance to the twelve is named in Paul and in Luke. The number twelve is theologically significant — the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve disciples as the nucleus of the restored people — but the appearance to the group is the one that the tradition carries as the central event.

The appearance to the five hundred is named only by Paul, and no Gospel gives an account of it. The reader should understand that Paul names this appearance as part of his argument, and that it may be a genuine tradition or it may be a theological figure. We cannot be sure.

The appearance to James is named only by Paul, and it is one of the most significant elements in the list. James, the brother of Jesus, was not a follower during the public ministry — the chapter on the

family problem made that clear. He is named in Mark 6 as one of the brothers, and the family thought Jesus had lost his mind. But by the time Paul writes, James is a leader in the Jerusalem church. Paul even meets James in Jerusalem in Galatians. The appearance to James is the most plausible explanation for James's change of heart. Whether it is a historical fact or a theological claim we cannot say, but it is the earliest testimony we have for how James came to be what he became.

The appearance to Paul is the most dramatic. Paul was not a follower. He was a persecutor of the church, present at the execution of Stephen, going to Damascus to arrest believers. Paul's own account of his conversion, in Acts and in his letters, is that the risen Jesus appeared to him on the road, and that the encounter changed everything. Paul's conversion is one of the few resurrection appearances that we can date with some confidence, because Paul himself is a known historical figure and his letters are our earliest sources. Whether Paul's experience was identical in kind to the appearances to the others we do not know. Paul himself calls it an appearance, and he places himself in the same list as the others, but he also says he is the least of the apostles for this reason. He knows his experience is different, and he names it as different.

What are the historical explanations that the sources allow?

The chapter does not choose among them. It names the range and lets the reader carry it.

One explanation is that the resurrection is exactly what the tradition says it is: a literal, physical raising of Jesus from the dead by God, the vindication of the man who had proclaimed the kingdom, the event that reversed the death and transformed the scattered followers into a movement that would outlast the Roman empire. This is the position of the Christian tradition, and it is a coherent position that the sources support from the inside. It is not a position the historian can confirm or deny on historical grounds alone, because it is a claim about what God did, and history cannot adjudicate the actions of God.

A second explanation is that the tomb was found empty, and that the empty tomb gave rise to the belief in the resurrection, but that the belief in resurrection exceeded what the empty tomb could establish on its own. The Gospels preserve a story in which a tomb is found empty and the discovery is understood as a resurrection, but the historian cannot say what made the tomb empty. The body could have been removed, or the women could have gone to the wrong tomb, or the body could have been buried elsewhere. The empty tomb is a fact asserted by the tradition; its cause is not recoverable with confidence.

A third explanation is that the appearances were visionary and psychological, not physical. The followers of Jesus, in grief and confusion, experienced visions of Jesus that they understood as his being alive. Paul's own language in 1 Corinthians 15 is careful on this point: he speaks of a "spiritual body," he distinguishes the resurrection body from the natural body, and he argues that the resurrection is a transformation, not a resuscitation. Whether Paul's language represents a physical resuscitation or a transformed, spiritual existence is a question the sources leave open. The Gospels, on the other hand, give us accounts in which the risen Jesus eats and shows his wounds and is mistaken for a gardener — physical details that go in a different direction from Paul's language. The sources do not agree on what kind of resurrection is being asserted.

A fourth explanation is that the resurrection belief developed over time, that the earliest tradition (Paul's list of appearances) is nearer to the events, and that the Gospels' elaborate empty tomb and appearance stories are later developments shaped by the growing belief. This is the position of many

historians of the tradition, and it has the support of the relative dating of the sources. Paul is earlier than the Gospels, and Paul's account is simpler — he does not describe the empty tomb in detail. But this position does not settle whether anything actually happened. It only says that the tradition developed.

A fifth explanation is that the whole story is a later invention, that the resurrection belief was created by the early church to account for the survival of the movement after the crucifixion. This is the position of some historians, and it is a position that has the support of the fact that resurrection was the expected form of a vindication in apocalyptic Judaism. But the embarrassment principle operates against this explanation. The empty tomb story is not a story that flatters the movement. The women are afraid and silent. Peter is restored after a denial. Paul, the persecutor, gets an appearance. The disciples do not believe at first. The tradition carries a story that does not simply make the heroes look good. Whether that is enough to establish historicity is a question on which historians differ. The honest position is this, and the chapter ends with it rather than resolving it.

We can say that within a generation of the crucifixion, a movement that had been scattered and terrified by the death of its leader was asserting with confidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead. We can say that this assertion was grounded in claims of appearances to specific people — Peter, the twelve, James, and Paul — and that the earliest written testimony (Paul, 1 Corinthians 15) names these appearances and treats them as the foundation of the faith. We can say that the Gospels, written later, preserve a family of empty tomb and appearance traditions that share a common frame but diverge in detail. We can say that the women are named as the discoverers of the empty tomb in all four Gospels, and that this is a detail that the embarrassment principle makes more secure. We can say that Paul's conversion is the one appearance that we can date with some confidence and that it is genuinely historical in the sense that Paul himself is a known person and his letters are our earliest sources.

We cannot say that the tomb was definitely empty, because the sources are traditions, not verified reports. We cannot say that the appearances were physical or visionary or both, because the sources disagree and the historian cannot see the events. We cannot say that the resurrection is a fact the historian can confirm, because the resurrection is a claim about God, and the historian's tools do not reach that claim. We cannot say that the story is a pure invention, because the earliest testimony is too early and carries too many elements that the later tradition would not have invented.

The reader who is a Christian should understand that this chapter has not taken away what they believe. It has named what the sources are and what they are not, and it has laid out the range of historical explanation without choosing. The reader who holds the resurrection to be a fact of history should understand that the sources support that reading from within the tradition, and that the historian cannot confirm or deny it on historical grounds alone. The reader who does not hold the resurrection should understand that the sources are not simply a later fiction, and that the tradition carries a story that has elements of embarrassment and early testimony that the historian has to account for. The reader who is unsure should understand that the gap between the death and the resurrection belief is real, and that the honest position is to hold the sources honestly and not to pretend that the gap is filled in by anything we can verify.

The chapter does not fill in the gap. The chapter does not tell the reader what to believe about what happened on the first day of the week. The chapter tells the reader what the sources say, what they do not say, and what the honest position is.

And now the chapter turns to what became of the people who had been there.

The resurrection belief did not leave the followers where they were. The women who had been at the cross and at the tomb became witnesses and proclaimers. The men who had fled came back. Peter, who had denied, became the leader of the Jerusalem community. James, who had not been a follower, became a leader in that same community. The scattered followers became a community that met, ate, prayed, and grew. And one of the persecutors became a follower, and that follower became the apostle to the nations.

The story of what became of the people is the story of the next chapter. It is the story of the decades after the first day of the week, when the movement that had been scattered by a Roman cross became a movement that outlasted the Roman empire.

The Ones Who Were Left

The first day of the week changed everything, and it changed nothing at the same time. The women who had been at the tomb went back and told the disciples, and the disciples did not believe them at first, and then something shifted, and the men who had fled came back, and the scattered band became a community again, and the community grew, and the movement that had been crushed by a Roman cross began to move again.

This chapter is about what became of the people. It is about Peter, and James the brother, and Mary of Magdala, and Paul. It is about the Jerusalem community, and the war of 70 CE, and the parting of ways between the movement that had been Jesus's and the Judaism that had been its world. It is about the first decades after the first day of the week, and about the strange fact that the movement did not die with him.

The chapter does not tell the story of the resurrection appearances as history. Chapter 28 laid out what the sources say and what they do not say about that. This chapter starts from the point after the belief had taken hold and asks what happened to the people who held it. The story of the afterlife of Jesus is not a single story. It is several stories, and they do not all point in the same direction, and the reader should understand that the early church was not a single thing.

Peter is the first person the chapter should name, because he is the one who comes back from the denial and becomes the leader. The resurrection tradition holds that the risen Jesus appeared to Peter first, before the twelve, before the five hundred, before anyone else, and that this personal restoration was the beginning of Peter's recovery from the night he had denied knowing Jesus.

What Peter did in the days that followed we cannot reconstruct in detail. The Gospels do not describe his immediate aftermath. Acts, the first volume of the New Testament, has Peter standing with the eleven and preaching to the crowds at Pentecost, and Acts has Peter healing, preaching, and opposing the authorities in Jerusalem. But Acts is a theological history written decades later, and the reader should understand that Acts shapes Peter for its own purposes. The historian can say less about what Peter actually did in the weeks and months after the crucifixion than Acts implies.

What the historian can say is that Peter was the central figure in the Jerusalem community in the early years. Paul, writing in the mid-50s, names Peter as one of the leaders, and Paul even meets Peter in Jerusalem and stays with him for fifteen days, according to Galatians. Peter is called Cephas in Paul, which is Aramaic for "rock," and the name is given to him by the tradition, probably by Jesus himself in some form, though the Gospels give the naming differently. Peter is the one who speaks for the group at critical moments — "You are the Christ" in Mark 8, the denials in all four Gospels, the leadership at Pentecost in Acts, the vision of the sheet in Acts 10 that opens the movement to Gentiles.

Peter's position in the Jerusalem community is the most secure fact about the early years. He is named by Paul, by the Gospels, and by the early tradition. He is the leader of the Jerusalem church in the period before Paul's missions to the Gentiles became the larger story. His relationship to James the brother, who emerges as the leader of the Jerusalem community later, is complicated and we do not know exactly how the transition happened. Paul's account in Galatians suggests that Peter and James were both leaders in Jerusalem at the same time, with different spheres of influence, and that there was tension between them at points. The reader should understand Peter as the early leader of the Jerusalem community, and as the one Jesus restored after the denial, and as the one whose later life is not well documented.

Tradition has Peter going to Rome and being martyred there in the 60s, during the persecution under Nero, and crucified upside down at his own request because he was not worthy to die in the same way as Jesus. This tradition is early and widely held, but it is tradition, not verified history. The reader should understand that Peter's death in Rome is a tradition the church carried, and that it is plausible given what we know of the Roman church in the 60s, but that the historian cannot confirm it with the same confidence as the resurrection appearance to Peter. What we can say is that Peter's leadership in the Jerusalem community is secure, and that his death, wherever and however it happened, is the end of the first leader of the movement.

James the brother of Jesus is the second person the chapter should name, because his story is one of the most striking in the early history. James was not a follower. The chapter on the family problem made that clear. Mark names James as one of Jesus's brothers, and the family thought Jesus had lost his mind. James was not at the cross. James was not at the tomb. James is not in the list of the twelve. James was, by all the evidence, outside the movement during the public ministry.

And then James became a leader, and the most important leader in Jerusalem after Peter, and the person to whom Paul defers. Paul calls James the "brother of the Lord" in Galatians, and Paul treats him as the leader of the Jerusalem church, and Paul is careful to say that he did not submit his gospel to anyone except James, Peter, and John — the three "pillars." James is the one who chaired the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, the meeting that decided whether Gentile believers had to keep the Torah. James's decision — that Gentiles did not need to become Jews to be part of the movement — was one of the most consequential decisions in the history of the Christian church, and it was made by the brother of Jesus.

The resurrection appearance to James, named in 1 Corinthians 15, is the most plausible explanation for this change. We cannot say that the appearance to James is a historical fact we can verify, but we can say that it is the earliest explanation the tradition has for how James went from sceptic to leader, and that it is an explanation the historian has to take seriously. Whatever the explanation, James

became what he became, and his position in the Jerusalem community is one of the most secure facts about the early decades.

James's later life and death are also part of the tradition. Josephus, the Jewish historian writing in the 90s, names James as the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, and says that James was condemned to death by the high priest Ananus in 62 CE, during the gap between the death of Festus the procurator and the arrival of his successor Albinus. The condemnation was for breaking the Jewish law, according to Josephus, and James was stoned. The reader should understand that Josephus's account of James's death is one of the few outside references to a specific person in the early Jerusalem community, and that it is a datum the historian can use with some confidence. James died in Jerusalem in the early 60s, condemned by the high priest, and his death is attested by a Jewish historian who had no interest in promoting Christianity.

What James believed, and what he intended for the Jerusalem community, is a matter of debate. The letter of James in the New Testament is traditionally ascribed to him, but the letter's authorship is uncertain, and the reader should not assume that the letter represents James's own views simply because it is called his. The Jerusalem community under James seems to have been observant in Jewish terms — the community continued to keep the Temple, to offer sacrifices, to keep the Torah — and the parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission was a slow process, not a single decision. James's position was the bridge between the two, and the bridge was held until his death.

Mary of Magdala is the third person the chapter should name, because she is the woman who appears at the most important points in the tradition and whose role has been most badly misrepresented. The chapter on the people who followed made the correction: Mary of Magdala is not a prostitute in the Gospels. She is a woman from whom seven demons had gone out, a follower of Jesus who provided for the ministry, a witness at the cross, a witness at the tomb, and the first person to whom the risen Jesus appears according to John.

The tradition gives Mary of Magdala a role that the later church did not fully honour. She is the first witness of the resurrection in John, and she is the one to whom Jesus says his name and who recognises him. The reader should understand that this is not a minor point. The first witness of the resurrection in the earliest Gospel is a woman, and the church that carried the tradition preserved the fact even though it did not flatter the later hierarchy. The embarrassment principle, applied at the baptism and at the cross and at the empty tomb, applies here too. The fact that Mary of Magdala is the first witness in the tradition is evidence that the tradition is close to what was remembered.

What Mary of Magdala did after the resurrection we do not know in detail. The tradition has her among the women who followed Jesus from Galilee and who remained with the movement in Jerusalem. Later tradition has her in various places — in the south of France, in Ephesus, in other locations — but these later traditions are not well attested and should not be confused with the early evidence. The reader should understand that Mary of Magdala's later life is not something the sources tell us, and that the later traditions about her are stories the church told, not facts we can verify. What we can say is that she was at the cross, at the tomb, and at the first appearance according to John, and that she was one of the women whose presence in the movement the chapter on the people who followed named as a matter of course.

Paul is the fourth person the chapter should name, and Paul is the one whose story is most fully documented, because Paul wrote letters that survive and because those letters are the earliest Christian documents we have. Paul is also the one whose story connects the Jerusalem community to the Gentile mission, and whose story is the reason the movement spread beyond Judaism and became the church that outlasted the Roman empire.

Paul was not one of the twelve. Paul was a Jew from Tarsus, a Pharisee according to his own account, a Roman citizen, and a persecutor of the church before his conversion. Paul's account of his conversion — the risen Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus — is the one resurrection appearance we can date with some confidence, because Paul himself is a known person and his letters are our earliest sources. Paul's conversion is a turning point in the history of the movement, because it is the moment when one of the persecutors became its most powerful advocate.

Paul's letters show us a man who has a complicated relationship to the Jerusalem community. Paul received his gospel, he says in Galatians, not from human beings but through a revelation of Jesus Christ, and he did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him but went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Only after three years did he go to Jerusalem and stay with Peter for fifteen days. Paul's relationship to Peter and James was one of independence and tension at the same time: Paul insisted that his gospel was from God and not from the Jerusalem leaders, but he also recognised them as pillars and submitted his gospel to them at one point for approval.

Paul's missions to the Gentiles are the largest story in the early decades. Paul preached in the Roman empire from Antioch to Corinth to Ephesus, and his letters to those churches — the letters to the Galatians, the Corinthians, the Romans, the Philippians, the Thessalonians — are the earliest Christian documents we have. Paul's theology of the cross and the resurrection, his argument that Gentiles do not need to keep the Torah, his understanding of the church as the body of Christ, his vision of the return of the Lord — all of these are in his letters, and they are the earliest source of the Christian theology that shaped the church.

Paul's death is not well documented. Tradition holds that Paul was martyred in Rome during the persecution under Nero, and the tradition is early and widely held, but like Peter's death it is tradition rather than verified history. The Roman church in the 60s was a known community, and Paul's presence there is plausible, and the tradition of his martyrdom there is a tradition the church carried. What the historian can say is that Paul was executed in Rome, probably in the 60s, and that his letters survive as the earliest Christian documents we have. The reader should understand Paul as the one whose conversion and missions are the most historically secure element in the afterlife story, because his own writings are our earliest sources and because the movement's spread into the Gentile world is the most consequential thing that happened after the first day of the week.

The Jerusalem community is the fifth thing the chapter should name, because it is the community that held the centre of the movement after the crucifixion and before the parting of ways. The Jerusalem community was Jewish. It kept the Temple. It observed the Torah. It prayed in the Temple. It was, in many respects, a Jewish sect, and the historian should understand it in those terms rather than as the beginning of a church that was separate from Judaism from the start.

The Jerusalem community is attested in Acts, in Paul's letters, and in Josephus. Acts gives a picture of the community in the early years — the believers sharing their goods, the healings, the growth, the conflict with the authorities — but Acts is a theological history and the reader should understand it as

a shaped account, not a report. Paul's letters give us glimpses of the Jerusalem community from the outside — Paul's visits, his conflicts with Peter over the eating with Gentiles at Antioch, his awareness of the poor in Jerusalem — and Paul's account is the more reliable source for the tensions between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission.

The Jerusalem community survived the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, but not as the same community. The destruction of the Temple was the single most consequential event in the history of Judaism in the first century, and it was also the event that separated the Jerusalem community from its Jewish context in a way that could not be reversed. A community that had kept the Temple and offered sacrifices in it could not survive the Temple's destruction as a Temple community. The community either had to become something else or disappear.

What happened to the Jerusalem community after 70 is not fully known. The brother of Jesus named Simeon, who was the son of Clopas and the nephew of Jesus according to later tradition, became the leader of the Jerusalem church after James's death, and Simeon held the position until his own death in the 100s, during the persecution under Trajan. The tradition of Simeon is early and is attested in a way that suggests the Jerusalem church maintained a leadership line after James. But the Jerusalem church was smaller, poorer, and more isolated after the war than before, and its relationship to the Gentile churches was increasingly strained.

The parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile movement was a slow process, not a single event. The destruction of the Temple accelerated it, but it had begun before 70. Paul's conflicts with Peter and James in Antioch and in Galatians show that the tension between the Torah-observant Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission was already active in the 50s. The letter of James, if it does represent the standpoint of the Jerusalem community or a community close to it, shows a movement that is still deeply Jewish in its concerns and still operating within the Torah-shaped world. The parting of ways was the process by which the movement that had been Jesus's became two things: a Jewish community in Jerusalem that kept the Torah and a Gentile movement that did not, and the two were increasingly separate, and the separation became the parting of ways that produced what we now call Christianity and Judaism as distinct religions.

The reader should understand this process as slow and as conflictual, and as not the intention of the earliest believers. The earliest believers did not think of themselves as founding a new religion. They thought of themselves as a movement within Judaism, a sect, a renewal, a fulfilment. The separation from Judaism was forced by events — the destruction of the Temple, the spread of the Gentile mission, the conflicts with the synagogue, the war — and by the choices of the communities on both sides, and it was not a decision the earliest believers would have recognised as theirs.

The war of 70 CE is the event that made the parting of ways irreversible. The Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70, after a siege that began in the spring and ended in the summer with the city taken and the Temple burned. The war was the end of the Jewish revolt that had begun in 66, and it was the end of the Temple as the centre of Jewish life, and it was the end of the Jerusalem community in the form it had had before the war.

Josephus, writing after the war, gives us the detailed account of the siege and destruction, and his account is our best source for what happened. The reader should understand the war of 70 as the event that reshaped everything — Judaism, the Jerusalem community, the relationship between the movement and its Jewish context, and the conditions in which the Gentile mission grew. The war

created the conditions in which Christianity, as a Gentile-dominated movement, could develop as something separate from Judaism, and the war also created the conditions in which Judaism, without the Temple, had to reorganise around the synagogue and the Torah and the rabbis, and in which the Pharisees, who had been a piety movement within Judaism, became the leaders of the restructured Judaism that survived.

The reader should also understand that the war of 70 makes the chapter's story of the afterlife of Jesus a story that includes violence and destruction and loss. The movement that had been Jesus's was caught in a war that was not about Jesus. The Jerusalem community was in Jerusalem during the war, and the destruction of the city and the Temple was the destruction of the place where the community had gathered. The community survived the war, but it did not survive it intact, and the parting of ways that had been building for decades became, after the war, a separation that could not be undone.

The ones who were left, then, were Peter, who came back from the denial and led the Jerusalem community until his death; James the brother, who went from sceptic to leader and held the bridge between the Torah-observant Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission until his death in 62; Mary of Magdala, who was at the cross and at the tomb and at the first appearance and whose name the tradition carried as the first witness; Paul, who was the persecutor who became the apostle to the nations and whose letters are the earliest documents we have; and the Jerusalem community, which held the centre until the war of 70, and which survived the war but did not survive it as the same thing.

The movement did not die with him. The readers have followed this book from the village of four hundred in Nazareth to the cross outside Jerusalem, and they have seen the man who was the centre of it die. And now, at the point where the story should end, the story did not end. The followers scattered and terrified by the arrest came back. The woman who had been at the cross and at the tomb became the first witness of the first day of the week. The man who had denied became the leader. The brother who had not been a follower became the chairman of the Jerusalem council. The persecutor became the apostle. The community that had been crushed by a Roman cross began to grow, and it grew into a movement that would outlast the Roman empire.

The chapter does not resolve the question of what happened on the first day of the week. Chapter 28 laid out what the sources say and what they do not say about that. This chapter starts from the point after the belief had taken hold and traces what it did to the people who held it. The afterlife of Jesus is not a single story. It is the story of Peter and James and Mary and Paul and the Jerusalem community, and of the war of 70, and of the parting of ways, and of the movement that survived the crucifixion and built something that outlasted the empire that had killed him.

The next chapter closes the book where it opened, in Nazareth, and asks with the full weight of the book behind it what we can actually say about the man and what we cannot.

The Carpenter's Son

Thirty years ago, give or take, a young man walked out of this village and did not come back. The village was Nazareth. It had four hundred people, four hundred souls, four hundred lives lived close

enough that everyone's business was everyone else's knowledge. The young man worked with stone or wood — a *tektōn*, a builder, hands made for holding weight and weather — and he belonged to a family of day-labourers who did not own the land they stood on, who paid the taxes that the empire's arrangement demanded, who watched the building boom Herod and his successors created and took what work it offered. He walked out of it at some point in his thirties, after years of ordinary life inside that household, with brothers whose names are given in the Gospels, with a mother whose name is Mary, with a father who had probably died by then, or whose presence in the story simply faded when the story shifted to the adult man. He walked out and spent somewhere between one and three years walking back into the same country in a different way, talking to farmers and fishermen about God, eating with the people everyone else had decided were the wrong sort, and gathering a following that included twelve men and the women whose money made the movement possible.

That is the last frame of the book, and it is the same frame as the first. The reader began standing in the dust of a village that had no coins minted in its name, no pavement, no synagogue we can find, and no reason to think anything extraordinary would ever come out of it. The reader ends standing in the same village, with the full weight of the book behind them, asking the controlling question the book opened with: how does a nobody from a place this ordinary become the most consequential human being who ever lived — and what was it actually like to be him while it was happening?

The answer the book has been building toward is not a single sentence, and it is not a sentence that resolves itself neatly. It is a set of things the reader can say with genuine confidence and a set of things the reader cannot. The honest book ends by holding both.

What the reader can say, and what the reader can say with real confidence, is the solid ground this book has been walking on for thirty chapters.

The reader can say that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew who lived and died a Jew, inside Jewish arguments, and never founded a religion. This is not a conclusion the book pushes toward; it is the frame that opens it, the frame that runs through every chapter of Part Three, Part Four, and Part Five, the frame that should make the reader uncomfortable with any picture of Jesus as a figure floating above Judaism, correcting or transcending it. He was a Jew in Galilee who knew the Torah, who kept the Sabbath, who attended or expected to attend the pilgrimage festivals, who prayed the prayers of his people, who argued with other Jews about what fidelity to God meant, who stood within the same religious world as the Pharisees he disputed with, the Sadducees who held power in the Temple, the Essenes who set themselves apart, the disciples of John the Baptist, and all the other movements that crowded the Jewish landscape of the first century. The reader who finishes the book imagining Jesus as a man who came to replace Judaism has not been reading this book.

The reader can say that Jesus was a *tektōn*, a builder by trade, and that the romantic picture of the carpenter communing with the grain of wood in a quiet workshop belongs to later tradition and not to the life. He worked with his hands on material that had to hold weight, in a regional economy that was hungry for labour during the building boom Herod and Antipas created. He probably worked in Sepphoris and possibly in Tiberias. He belonged to a family that lived without land ownership and survived on daily work, which meant survival was always a little precarious and always tied to demand. This is not a picturesque detail. It is the economic condition of the man, and it is the material out of which his later option to leave the trade and walk into public life made sense.

The reader can say that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist at the Jordan, and that this is the single most secure fact about the beginning of his public life because it was an embarrassment no one in the early movement would have invented. It is the historian's principle taught in chapter 8: a tradition early Christians would not have made up is usually the one closest to what happened. The reader who understands that principle understands the next thirty chapters better than the reader who does not.

The reader can say that Jesus proclaimed a message centred on the kingdom of God — the rule of God breaking into the present — and that this message, stripped of two thousand years of accumulated meaning, was not a doctrine about the afterlife but a declaration that God's reign was arriving now, in his ministry, with a summons to live inside it. The reader can say that the kingdom was taught in parables that refused neat resolution, in the Beatitudes as reversal, in the Lord's Prayer as a petition for the present, in the healings and exorcisms as signs that the rule was breaking in, and in the table with the marginal as a sign of what the kingdom's social shape meant. The reader can say that the kingdom included the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the unclean, the people the religious and social order had pushed to the edge. The reader can say that this was not a tame message, and that it was not received as tame.

The reader can say that Jesus gathered followers — twelve men as a symbolic number tied to Israel's tribes, and the women who funded the ministry, among whom Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Susanna are named, and who are in the earliest sources at the funding, at the cross, and at the tomb. The reader can say that the women were not a footnote bolted on at the end. They were in from the beginning, and the book has tried to treat them as a matter of course, because the sources put them there and because any honest reconstruction would do the same.

The reader can say that Jesus' conflicts with other Jews — with Pharisees, with the traditions of purity, with the way Torah was kept — were internal debates between people who cared about the same things, and that the bad habit of reading them as hero-versus-villain, light-versus-darkness, truth-versus-legalism, is the most damaging reading habit two millennia of retelling have left us. The reader who understands this has understood one of the most important corrective lessons the book offers. The Pharisees are not the villains of a morality play. They are a Jewish movement concerned with the same Torah, the same purity, the same relationship between Israel and God, and the argument between them and Jesus is an argument inside a shared world.

The reader can say that Jesus made a decision to go to Jerusalem at Passover, and that this decision was made in the knowledge of what Jerusalem at Passover was: a pressure cooker of pilgrims and soldiers, a city under Roman occupation that the empire treated as a festival risk, and a place where any public claim made by a figure who had already been saying provocative things for months would have predictable consequences. The reader can say that whatever Jesus thought he was — Messiah, prophet, son of man, or some combination the book could not pin down — he had some sense of what he was walking into, because chapter 20 asked what he could reasonably have expected and the honest answer is that the downside was obvious. The upside was what he believed God was doing.

The reader can say that Jesus arranged or accepted or walked into a public demonstration that involved his entry into the city and his action in the Temple, and that whatever this was — a political act, a prophetic sign, or both — it was the thing that got him killed, because it was the thing the authorities could not leave alone. The reader can say that the Temple was the centre of the Jewish

world and that any public action against it during Passover, when Jerusalem was swollen with pilgrims and the Romans were on the porticoes with their soldiers, was an act of a kind that Rome treated as a threat to order.

The reader can say that Jesus was arrested at night, in Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives, carried before the high priest and then before the prefect Pontius Pilate, and crucified on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman state. The reader can say that crucifixion was not a quick execution but a public torture designed to humiliate and deter, and that the method was an instrument of policy, not an accident of a particular trial. The reader can say that Pilate was not the figure the Gospels later painted — a reluctant official pressured by the crowd but genuinely on the side of justice — and that Philo and Josephus describe a different man: a prefect capable of violence, corruption, and contempt for Jewish sensibilities, and a man for whom a political nuisance in Jerusalem at Passover was exactly the kind of problem he handled by crucifixion.

The reader can say that Jesus died on a cross, and that his death was real, and that the movement he had gathered was crushed and scattered by the time the Sabbath came, and that the men who had followed him had fled, and that Peter had denied him, and that the family who knew him best had thought he had lost his mind. The reader can say that the Saturday after the crucifixion was a silence, and that ending the chapter on that silence was not the book's choice but the shape of that day. The movement's centre was gone. The authorities had done what they set out to do. The state had eliminated a problem. Nothing in the visible evidence suggested anything different.

That is the ground the reader can stand on. It is solid. It is enough to build a life on. It is enough to build a church on, which is what happened. Everything that follows after the cross — the empty tomb, the appearances, the resurrection belief, the afterlife of the movement — is built on that ground, and the reader should understand the ground as the one thing that does not depend on any claim about what happened on the first day of the week.

Now the book must cross the line between what the sources report and what the sources say people came to believe, and it must do so without crossing into either the sermon or the sceptic's dismissal. Chapter 28 did this work in the middle of the book, and this chapter does it one more time at the end, because the end of the book is not the place to pretend the line doesn't exist.

The reader can say that on the first day of the week, some of the women who had been at the tomb — Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the others whose names the Gospels remember — went back from the tomb and told the disciples that the stone had been rolled away and that the body was not there. The reader can say that the earliest Gospel, Mark, ends with the women leaving the tomb in terror and saying nothing to anyone, and that the longer endings were added later. The reader can say that Matthew, Luke, and John each give different versions of what the women encountered and what they were told, and that the differences matter because they show that the tradition had not settled into a single story by the time the Gospels were written. The reader can say that Paul, writing in the mid-50s — within twenty years of the crucifixion — lists appearances of the risen Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15: to Cephas, to the twelve, to more than five hundred at one time, to James, to all the apostles, and last of all to Paul himself. The reader can say that Paul's list is our earliest testimony and that it gives the appearance tradition a date before the Gospels, before the later harmonisations, before the church had time to smooth the edges.

The reader can say that whatever happened on the first day of the week, the result was that the people who had been scattered and terrified came back together, and that the movement began to move again, and that within a generation people across the Roman empire were reorganising their lives around the man who had been crucified in Jerusalem. The reader can say that this is a fact — the fact of the movement's survival and rapid growth — and that it is a fact that every historical explanation has to account for, whether that explanation appeals to the resurrection, to grief and visionary experience, to the power of the message, to the network of women who funded the ministry, to the effect of the cross itself, or to a combination of all of these. The reader can say that the historian cannot choose between these explanations on the basis of the evidence available, and that the honest historian does not pretend that the evidence available forces a choice.

The reader can say that Peter came back from the denial and became the leader of the Jerusalem community, and that the tradition holds that the risen Jesus appeared to him first, and that this personal restoration is the most natural explanation for the recovery from the night of the denial. The reader can say that James the brother of Jesus — who had not been a follower, who had thought his brother had lost his mind, who is not in the list of the twelve — became the most important leader in Jerusalem after Peter, and that Paul defers to him as the brother of the Lord, and that James chaired the Jerusalem council that decided Gentile believers did not have to keep the Torah, and that James's change is the single most striking personal reversal in the early record. The reader can say that whatever explanation the historian offers for James's change, the change itself is a fact that has to be accounted for.

The reader can say that Mary of Magdala was at the cross, at the tomb, and at the first appearance according to John, and that she is the first witness of the resurrection in the earliest Gospel, and that the church preserved that fact even though it did not flatter the later hierarchy, and that the embarrassment principle applies here as it does at the baptism and at the cross and at the empty tomb. The reader can say that the fact that the first witness in the tradition is a woman is evidence that the tradition is close to what was remembered, because a tradition the early church would have wanted to edit would not have put a woman in that position.

The reader can say that Paul, the persecutor of the early movement, was converted by a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and that Paul's own letters are the earliest Christian documents we have, and that Paul's missions to the Gentiles are the reason the movement spread beyond Judaism and became the church that outlasted the Roman empire. The reader can say that Paul's death in Rome is a tradition we cannot verify but that is early and widely held, and that his letters survive and are the firmest evidence we have for the argument that the cross and resurrection were the centre of the message the movement carried.

The reader can say that the Jerusalem community survived the crucifixion, kept the Temple, observed the Torah, prayed in the Temple, and held the centre of the movement until the war of 70, and that the destruction of the Temple was the event that made the parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission irreversible, and that the parting of ways was slow and conflictual and was not the intention of the earliest believers, who thought of themselves as a movement within Judaism, not as the founders of a new religion. The reader can say that the parting of ways produced what we now call Christianity and Judaism as distinct religions, and that this was not something the earliest believers would have recognised as theirs.

The reader can say that the movement outlasted the Roman empire, and that it did so because of the combination of the message, the network, the resurrection belief, the Gentile mission that Paul opened, the survival of the Jerusalem community in some form, and the accidents of history that no one at the time could have predicted. The reader can say that this is the most consequential story in the book, and that it is a story that does not depend on the reader's agreement with any particular explanation of the first day of the week.

And now the book must name what the reader cannot say, because an honest book ends by telling the reader the limits of the ground they are standing on.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Jesus thought of himself in the privacy of his own mind. The titles — Messiah, prophet, son of man — were available in his world, and he used some of them and refused others, and the Gospels report his use of them in ways that are shaped by the needs of the later church. The reader cannot know whether Jesus thought of himself as the Messiah in the sense the term meant to his contemporaries, or whether he thought of himself as a prophet, or whether the son of man sayings go back to him or to the early church. The reader can say that the question is open, and that the evidence does not close it, and that this is not a failure of the book but a feature of the sources.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, whether Jesus expected the end of the world in his own lifetime. The apocalyptic frame runs through the sayings tradition, and the Gospel of Mark is saturated with it, and Jesus' words about this generation not passing away before all these things take place are among the most difficult things in the sources. The reader can say that the most uncomfortable finding in modern scholarship is that Jesus seems to have expected God to act soon, and that this finding cannot be simply dismissed. The reader can also say that the sources contain material that resists a single apocalyptic reading, and that the honest historian reports the tension without resolving it. Chapter 19 said this. This chapter says it again because the end of the book is the place where the tension must be held in full view.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Jesus and his disciples ate for their last meal, or whether it was a Passover meal, or what was said over the bread and the cup, because the synoptics and John disagree on the timing and the Gospels are not transparent reports of a historical event but accounts shaped by the needs of the communities that produced them. The reader can say that the meal was in Jerusalem, and that it was the last meal before the arrest, and that the tradition carries the memory of bread and wine and a command to remember, and that this is the memory the church has carried. What happened in that room in precise detail is not recoverable.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Judas Iscariot's motivation was. The reader can say that Judas is the piece that does not fit a simple story, and that the Gospels give him a role in the arrest and do not give him a motive the historian can verify, and that the reader should resist the psychological novel and accept the limit. We do not know why.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Mary of Magdala did after the resurrection. The reader can say that later traditions put her in various places — in the south of France, in Ephesus, in other locations — and that these later traditions are not early and are not the same as the early evidence. The reader can say that the later traditions about her are stories the church told, not facts we can verify. The reader can say that what we know is that she was at the

cross, at the tomb, and at the first appearance in John, and that this is enough to put her among the people who mattered.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what happened on the Friday afternoon outside Jerusalem. The reader can say that a man was crucified, and that the crucifixion was done by the Roman state, and that it was done at Passover, and that the man was Jesus of Nazareth, and that his death is the most secure fact in the entire story after the baptism. What the scene was like in precise detail — who was there at every moment, what was said at the cross, what John's theological additions are and what Mark's are — is not recoverable in the way the reader might want. The reader can say, from chapter 26, that crucifixion was a brutal method, and that the process could take days, and that the body was left to the elements or disposed of in a way that the reader cannot know. The reader can say that Jesus' death was real and that the movement's centre was gone, and that this is the ground on which everything after is built.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what the resurrection was. The reader can say that the sources report appearances, empty tomb traditions, and the formation of a belief; the reader can say that the earliest testimony is Paul's list; the reader can say that the historian can lay out the range of explanations and cannot choose between them. The reader can say that the resurrection is the claim the early church made, and that it is the claim on which the movement's afterlife stands, and that it is not a claim the historian can verify or falsify on the available evidence. The reader can say that the honest book does not conclude the question. It presents the possibilities with equal seriousness and leaves the reader to carry them.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Jesus was afraid of. The reader can say that the Gethsemane scene in the stillness before the arrest, with the prayer and the disciples who could not stay awake, is one of the most human moments in the sources, and that it conveys something about the cost of what Jesus was doing. But the Gethsemane scene is a story the Gospels shaped, and the reader who wants the private interior life of Jesus is asking a question the sources cannot answer. What he feared, what he hoped, what he felt in the hours before the arrest — these are not recoverable in the way a modern biography might want them to be. The reader can say that the sources give us scenes that feel human, and that this is enough to remind us that the man was human, but the inner life is not available.

The reader cannot say, with genuine historical confidence, what Nazareth was like in the years after Jesus left it. The reader can say that the village continued, and that the terraces continued to hold the soil, and that the building boom in Sepphoris and Tiberias went on, and that the family continued without him, and that whatever people in Nazareth said about him in the years after the crucifixion is not recorded. The reader can say that the silence of the village after the man left is the same kind of silence as the thirty years before he left. We do not know what Nazareth thought of what became of him. We only know what the sources outside the village record.

This is what the reader can say and what the reader cannot say, and the book has spent thirty chapters walking the line between them. The line is not a limitation of the book; it is the shape of the subject. A historical biography of Jesus of Nazareth can do what no sermon can do and what no sceptical dismissal can do: it can say what the sources allow and what they do not, and it can do so without treating the limits as a failure. The limits are not a failure. They are the condition of the subject.

The man walked out of this village thirty years ago. He walked out of a village of four hundred people that had no coins minted in its name, no pavement, no synagogue we can find. He walked out of a household of day-labourers who did not own the land they stood on. He walked out of a trade that meant work with the hands on material that had to hold weight. He walked out into the country he knew, and he spent between one and three years walking back into it in a different way, talking to farmers and fishermen about God, and gathering a following, and eating with the wrong people, and arguing with the people who cared about the Torah he cared about, and going to Jerusalem at Passover, and being arrested, and being crucified by the Roman state, and dying.

And then the movement he had gathered did not die. The women who had been at the cross and at the tomb carried the news. The man who had denied came back and led. The brother who had not been a follower became the chairman of the Jerusalem council. The persecutor became the apostle. The community that had been crushed by a Roman cross began to grow. Within a generation, people across the Roman empire were reorganising their lives around him. Within centuries, the empire itself had reorganised around him. Within millennia, the question of who he was had become the question around which the largest human community in history shaped itself.

The reader began this book standing in the dust of a village of four hundred people and asking how a nobody from a place this ordinary became the most consequential human being who ever lived. The reader ends it standing in the same place, with the same question, and with an answer that is not a single sentence and does not resolve itself neatly. The answer is that the man was a Jew who lived and died a Jew, inside Jewish arguments, and never founded a religion. The answer is that he was a builder by trade, and that the romantic carpenter belongs to later tradition. The answer is that he was baptised by John the Baptist, and that this is the most secure fact in the Gospels because it was an embarrassment. The answer is that he proclaimed the kingdom of God as the rule of God breaking into the present, and that the kingdom was taught in parables that refused neat resolution, in the Beatitudes as reversal, in the Lord's Prayer as a petition for the present, in the healings as signs, and in the table with the marginal as a sign of the kingdom's social shape. The answer is that he gathered followers — twelve men and the women who funded the ministry — and that the women were in from the beginning. The answer is that his conflicts with the Pharisees were internal debates between people who cared about the same things, and that the bad habit of reading them as hero versus villain is the most damaging reading habit two millennia of retelling have left us. The answer is that he went to Jerusalem at Passover knowing what the city was, and that he arranged or accepted or walked into a demonstration that involved the entry and the Temple, and that this was the thing that got him killed. The answer is that he was arrested, tried, and crucified by the Roman state, and that crucifixion was an instrument of policy, and that Pilate was not the figure the Gospels later painted. The answer is that he died, and that the movement was crushed and scattered by the time the Sabbath came, and that the Saturday was a silence.

And the answer is that the movement did not die. The women carried the news. The denier came back. The brother became the leader. The persecutor became the apostle. The community that had been crushed by a Roman cross began to grow. The reader can say that the result is a fact, and that the explanation is not a single thing the historian can confirm, and that the honest book does not pretend otherwise.

The reader who began the book as a believer may finish it with the ground shifted under their feet, because the book has said that Jesus seems to have expected God to act soon, and that the sources do not allow the reader to know what he thought of himself in his own mind, and that the resurrection is a claim the historian cannot verify or falsify on the available evidence. The reader who began the book as a sceptic may finish it with the ground shifted under their feet, because the book has said that the baptism is the most secure fact because it was an embarrassment, and that the women were in from the beginning, and that the movement's survival is a fact the historian has to account for and cannot simply dismiss. The book has tried to be neither a sermon nor a sceptical dismissal. It has tried to be a historical biography, warmly human, aggressively non-partisan, and honest about the limits of what the sources allow.

The reader who finishes this book with the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the risen Lord of the Christian church has not been argued out of that conviction by what is in these pages, because the book has not argued for or against the resurrection. The book has laid out what people said happened, when they said it, and what historians can and cannot establish. Then it has got out of the way. The reader who finishes the book with the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was a wandering teacher whose story was inflated by later communities has not been argued out of that conviction either, because the book has not argued for that either. The book has laid out what the sources say, what they do not say, and what the historian can and cannot do with them. Then it has got out of the way.

What the reader cannot do, if the book has done its work, is finish it with the bad habits of two thousand years of retelling still intact. The reader cannot finish it thinking of the Pharisees as hypocrites and Judaism as legalism and Jesus as the man who transcended both. The reader cannot finish it thinking of Pilate as a reluctant official pressured by the crowd. The reader cannot finish it thinking of Mary of Magdala as a prostitute. The reader cannot finish it thinking of the kingdom as heaven or the church or an internal state only. The reader cannot finish it thinking of Jesus as a figure floating above Judaism, correcting or transcending it. The reader cannot finish it thinking of the birth stories as transparent history. The reader cannot finish it thinking of the Gospels as transparent history. The reader cannot finish it thinking of the resurrection as a fact the historian can confirm or a fact the historian can dismiss.

All of these, the book has tried to correct, one by one, in thirty chapters, and the correction is not a sermon and not a dismissal but a patient, honest, sometimes uncomfortable laying out of what the sources say and what they do not say and what the historian can and cannot do with them. The reader who has followed the book from the village of four hundred to the cross outside Jerusalem, and from the cross to the first day of the week, and from the first day of the week to the people who were left, has now reached the end of the book. The question the book opened with — how does a nobody from a village of four hundred people become the most consequential human being who ever lived, and what was it actually like to be him while it was happening — has been answered as fully as the sources allow, and as honestly as the limits of the sources permit.

What was it actually like to be him? It was like being a Jew in Galilee in the first century, inside the Torah and the Temple and the Sabbath and the hope for God's kingdom. It was like being a builder whose hands were shaped by stone and wood, whose family lived without land, whose survival depended on daily work. It was like being baptised by a wild man at the Jordan in a baptism of repentance that embarrassed the later church. It was like walking through the villages of Galilee

proclaiming that the rule of God was breaking into the present, and teaching in parables that refused neat resolution, and eating with the wrong people, and healing the unclean, and arguing with the Pharisees about the right keeping of Torah, and knowing that his own family thought he had lost his mind. It was like deciding to go to Jerusalem at Passover, knowing what the city was and what the downside was, because something about what God was doing made the downside worth the risk. It was like entering the city in a demonstration that involved the Temple, and being arrested at night on the Mount of Olives, and being carried before the high priest and the prefect, and being crucified on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem by the Roman state, and dying under a method designed to humiliate and deter and destroy. It was like being a man who knew, in some measure, what he was walking into, and who walked into it anyway because he believed God was acting.

That is the answer. It is not a sentence. It is a life. It is a life the reader has followed from the village of four hundred to the cross outside Jerusalem, and now it is time for the reader to leave the village, and the cross, and the first day of the week, and the people who were left, and go back into the world with the question answered as fully and as honestly as it can be answered.

The carpenter's son. The builder from Nazareth. The Jew who walked out of a village so small it had no coins minted in its name and spent a few years talking to farmers and fishermen about God, and went to Jerusalem at Passover, and was crucified by the Roman state, and died, and the movement he had gathered did not die with him. That is who he was. That is what the book can say. That is enough.

Appendices

Timeline

c. 6–4 BCE — Jesus of Nazareth born, probably in Nazareth or its vicinity, during the reign of Herod the Great.

c. 4 BCE — Death of Herod the Great. Revolt and Roman reprisals, including the burning of Sepphoris, four miles from Nazareth.

c. 1 CE — Jesus' early childhood. The family lives in Nazareth, a village of around four hundred, without land ownership, dependent on daily work. Joseph, if still alive, works as a *tektōn*, a builder.

c. 10–20 CE — Jesus grows up in Nazareth, learning the trade. The building boom in Sepphoris and Tiberias offers work for a builder. Jesus is part of a large family — brothers and sisters whose names are given in Mark 6.

c. 20–27 CE — The hidden years. Near-total silence in the sources. Jesus lives as an ordinary Jewish man in Galilee. The birth stories in Matthew and Luke are later compositions, not transparent history.

c. 28–29 CE — John the Baptist preaching and baptising at the Jordan. Jesus comes to the river and is baptised by John. This is the most secure fact about the beginning of Jesus' public life, because it was an embarrassment no one in the early movement would have invented.

c. 28–29 CE — Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness after his baptism, in a landscape where Jewish men understood themselves to be in confrontation with what the mission would cost.

c. 28–29 CE — Jesus leaves Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum, a fishing village on the lake. He gathers followers — twelve men and the women who fund the ministry, among them Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna.

c. 28–29 CE — Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God — the rule of God breaking into the present — and teaches in parables, in the Beatitudes, in the Lord's Prayer, in healings and exorcisms, and in the table with the marginal.

c. 28–29 CE — Jesus' conflicts with other Jews — Pharisees, the traditions of purity, the way Torah is kept — are internal debates between people who care about the same things. The bad habit of reading them as hero versus villain is the most damaging reading habit two millennia of retelling have left us.

c. 29–30 CE — Jesus' public ministry continues for somewhere between one and three years. He walks through the villages of Galilee and beyond.

c. 30 CE — Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem at Passover, knowing what the city is. Whatever he thought he was — Messiah, prophet, son of man — he had some sense of what he was walking into.

c. 30 CE — Jesus enters Jerusalem and acts in the Temple. This is the thing that gets him killed, because it is the thing the authorities cannot leave alone.

c. 30 CE — The last meal. The synoptics and John disagree on the timing; the meal's meaning was interpreted differently by different early communities. What was said in that room is not recoverable in detail.

c. 30 CE — Jesus is arrested at night in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Judas Iscariot is part of the story, but his motivation is not recoverable.

c. 30 CE — Jesus is carried before the high priest Caiaphas and then before the prefect Pontius Pilate. Pilate is ordered to handle a political nuisance in Jerusalem at Passover, exactly the kind of problem he handled by crucifixion.

c. 30 CE — Jesus is crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem by the Roman state. Crucifixion is a public torture designed to humiliate, deter, and destroy. It can take days. The method is an instrument of policy, not an accident of a particular trial.

c. 30 CE — Jesus dies. The movement is crushed and scattered. The Saturday after the crucifixion is a silence. The men who had followed him have fled. Peter has denied him. The family who knew him best thought he had lost his mind.

c. 30 CE — On the first day of the week, the women who had been at the tomb go back and tell the disciples. The sources report appearances of the risen Jesus. Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 15 — to Cephas, to the twelve, to more than five hundred, to James, to all the apostles, and last of all to Paul — is our earliest testimony.

c. 30–33 CE — The belief in the resurrection takes hold. The scattered followers come back together. The movement begins to move again.

c. 35 CE — Paul, a persecutor of the early movement, is converted by a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul's letters are the earliest Christian documents we have.

c. 40s–50s CE — Paul's missions to the Gentiles spread the movement beyond Judaism. Paul's letters to the Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Thessalonians are the earliest Christian documents.

c. 50s CE — The Jerusalem community holds the centre of the movement. James the brother of Jesus chairs the Jerusalem council, which decides that Gentile believers do not need to keep the Torah.

c. 60s CE — James the brother of Jesus is condemned to death in Jerusalem by the high priest Ananus, during the gap between the death of Festus and the arrival of Albinus, and stoned for breaking the Jewish law. Josephus attests the event.

c. 60s CE — Peter dies, probably in Rome during the persecution under Nero, probably crucified. This is a tradition we cannot verify but is early and widely held.

c. 60s CE — Paul dies, probably in Rome during the persecution under Nero. This is a tradition we cannot verify but is early and widely held.

66–70 CE — The Jewish war against Rome. The Roman army under Titus destroys Jerusalem and the Temple in 70.

70 CE — The destruction of the Temple. The single most consequential event in the history of Judaism in the first century, and the event that makes the parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission irreversible.

After 70 CE — The Jerusalem community survives the war but does not survive it intact. Simeon, the brother of Jesus named in later tradition, becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church and holds the position until his death in the 100s.

After 70 CE — The parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission becomes a separation that produces what we now call Christianity and Judaism as distinct religions. The earliest believers did not think of themselves as founding a new religion. They thought of themselves as a movement within Judaism.

c. 70–100 CE — The Gospels are written: Mark around 70, Matthew and Luke in the 80s, John later. They are interested sources, written decades after the events, by people making a case.

100s CE — The movement outlasts the Roman empire. The question of who Jesus was becomes the question around which the largest human community in history shapes itself.

Cast of Characters

A brief *dramatis personae*. The book moves through thirty chapters and a cast that grows across them; this is the anchor the reader can return to when names recur.

The central figure

Jesus of Nazareth — A *tektōn*, a builder from Nazareth in Galilee. About thirty when his public ministry begins, about thirty-three when he is crucified in Jerusalem. His mother is Mary, his father Joseph. He walks into the Judean countryside, spends one to three years talking to farmers and fishermen about God, goes to Jerusalem at Passover, and is executed by the Roman state. Within a generation, people across the empire are reorganising their lives around him.

The family

Mary — The mother of Jesus. Her name is given in the Gospels. After the infancy stories she is not prominent in the narrative; what is known of her later life is thin. The book opens and closes in the village where she raised her son.

Joseph — Jesus' father, a *tektōn* like his son. He is largely absent from the story after the childhood narratives, and the Gospels are silent on when he dies. A large family without land, dependent on daily work, is what the household economics look like.

The brothers and sisters of Jesus — Named in Mark 6: James, Joseph (or Joses), Judas, and Simon, and at least two sisters whose names are not given. They do not follow him during the public ministry. James the brother of Jesus becomes a leader of the Jerusalem community after the crucifixion. The family who knew him best thought he had lost his mind (Mark 3:21) — the book leaves that on the table.

The forerunner

John the Baptist — The best-attested figure in the region at the moment across multiple sources: the Gospels, Josephus, and the wider Jewish context. Preaches repentance at the Jordan, baptises crowds, and calls for moral and political reckoning. Herod Antipas has him killed. The baptism of Jesus by John is the most secure fact about the beginning of Jesus' public life, because it was an embarrassment the early movement would not have invented.

The twelve and the wider circle

Simon Peter (Cephas) — A fisherman from the house church in Capernaum, the most prominent of the twelve. Denies Jesus at the arrest. Present at the tomb in the resurrection traditions. Paul calls him Cephas; the Gospels call him Peter.

Andrew — Peter's brother, also a fisherman. One of the first called.

James, son of Zebedee — One of the twelve, a fisherman, brother of John. Part of the inner circle with Peter and John in the scene at the Transfiguration and the Gethsemane narrative.

John, son of Zebedee — Brother of James, one of the twelve. Traditionally identified as the author of the fourth Gospel, though the historian is cautious about that attribution. Part of the inner circle.

Philip — One of the twelve.

Bartholomew — One of the twelve. Sometimes identified with Nathanael in John.

Thomas — One of the twelve. The "doubting Thomas" of tradition comes from a resurrection appearance story.

Matthew — One of the twelve, a tax collector. The name is associated with the first Gospel, though the Gospel's author is not necessarily the same Matthew.

James, son of Alphaeus — One of the twelve. Distinguished from James the brother of Jesus and from James son of Zebedee.

Thaddaeus — One of the twelve. Also called Jude in some traditions.

Simon the Zealot — One of the twelve. The name is suggestive but the historian does not assume he was a Zealot in the political sense.

Judas Iscariot — One of the twelve, who betrays Jesus to the authorities. The piece that does not fit a simple story. His motivation is not recoverable. The name Iscariot is of uncertain meaning.

Matthias — The disciple chosen to replace Judas Iscariot after the arrest, according to Acts.

Mary Magdalene — Mary of Magdala, a woman from whom seven demons had gone out, a follower of Jesus, a provider for the ministry, a witness at the cross, a witness at the tomb, and in John the first person to whom the risen Jesus appears. Not a prostitute. The association with prostitution is a later conflation with an unnamed sinful woman in Luke.

Joanna — A woman who provided for the ministry, according to Luke 8:3. The wife of Chuza, Herod Antipas' steward — which means she had access to the Herodian court and resources that crossed social boundaries. Luke 8:3 is a bombshell the book treats as one.

Susanna — Another woman who provided for the ministry, named in Luke 8:3.

The Jerusalem leadership

James the brother of Jesus — Not a follower during the public ministry, then a leader of the Jerusalem community, the chairman of the Jerusalem council, and the person Paul defers to as the brother of the Lord. Condemned to death and stoned in Jerusalem by the high priest Ananus, during a gap between Roman governors, an event Josephus attests.

Simeon (Son of Clopas) — In later tradition, a son of Joseph and a brother of Jesus, who becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church after the Jewish war of 70 and holds the position until his death in the 100s.

The hostile powers

Herod the Great — Client king of Judea under Rome from 37 to 4 BCE. Builder of the Temple platform, the palace at Jericho, the theatre in Sepphoris. The king whose building programme dominated the landscape of Jesus' entire life and whose taxes and labour drafts a peasant family felt in their bones.

Herod Antipas — Son of Herod the Great, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 BCE to 39 CE. Rebuilt Sepphoris and built Tiberias. Killed John the Baptist. The ruler to whom Jesus is sent for examination in Luke.

Pontius Pilate — Roman prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 CE. The man who ordered Jesus' crucifixion. Not the figure the Gospels later painted — a reluctant official pressured by the crowd — but a prefect capable of violence, corruption, and contempt for Jewish sensibilities, as Philo and Josephus describe.

Caiaphas — Joseph Caiaphas, high priest from 18 to 36 CE. The man in whose house the hearing before the Sanhedrin appears to have taken place. A long-serving high priest in a period when the office changed frequently, and a collaborator with Roman authority.

Ananus — A high priest who condemned James the brother of Jesus to death, during a gap between the death of the Roman governor Festus and the arrival of Albinus, an event Josephus attests.

Paul (Saul of Tarsus) — A Jew from Tarsus, a Pharisee according to his own account, a Roman citizen, and a persecutor of the early movement before his conversion by a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. The author of the earliest Christian letters, the earliest Christian documents we have. His missions to the Gentiles opened the movement to the wider Roman world and made the parting of ways between the Jerusalem community and the Gentile mission irreversible after 70.

Titus — Son of the Roman emperor Vespasian, commander of the army that destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE.

Josephus — Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, author of *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. Our best outside source for the period. Not a character in the story of Jesus, but the figure without whom the historian cannot reconstruct it.

This list is a guide, not a verdict on who matters most. The book's measure of importance is not prominence in this list but presence in the evidence.

Glossary

Antipas — Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruler of Galilee and Perea from 4 BCE to 39 CE. The tetrarch who killed John the Baptist and to whom Jesus was sent for examination in Luke.

basileia — The Greek word translated "kingdom." It means rule, reign, the domain of a king. The kingdom of God is the rule of God, not a territory on a map.

Caiaphas — Joseph Caiaphas, high priest from 18 to 36 CE, the man in whose house the hearing before the Sanhedrin appears to have taken place.

cephas — Aramaic for "rock." The name given to Simon Peter. Paul calls him Cephas; the Gospels call him Peter, which is the Greek equivalent.

crucifixion — A Roman method of execution designed to humiliate, deter, and destroy. Not a quick execution but a public torture that could take days. An instrument of policy, not an accident of a particular trial.

denarius — The standard silver coin of the Roman economy, roughly a day's wage for a labourer. The coin in the Gospels' economic references.

disciples — The followers of Jesus, especially the twelve. The word means "learners" or "pupils." The term is not identical with the twelve; it is sometimes broader.

Essenes — A Jewish movement of the second and first centuries BCE and CE, known from Josephus, Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. A separatist, highly disciplined, apocalyptic group.

exorcism — The casting out of demons or unclean spirits. In the ancient world, illness and possession were not sharply distinguished, and exorcism belonged in the world of healers and wonder-workers the reader already knows from Josephus and other sources.

Galilee — The northern region of Judea, around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' home region. A place of mixed population, agriculture, fishing, and the building boom Herod and his successors created.

gentile — A non-Jew. A term the early movement used for the wider Roman world. The Gentile mission was the spread of the movement beyond Judaism.

gospel — Originally "good news," then the genre of the four narrative accounts of Jesus' life (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John), written decades after the crucifixion.

herod the great — Herod I, client king of Judea under Rome from 37 to 4 BCE. The builder of the Temple platform, the palace at Jericho, the theatre in Sepphoris. The king who dominated the landscape of Jesus' entire life.

james — James the brother of Jesus. Not a follower during the public ministry, then a leader of the Jerusalem community, the chairman of the Jerusalem council, and the person Paul defers to as the brother of the Lord.

jerusalem — The holy city, the site of the Temple, the centre of Jewish pilgrimage. Jesus went there at Passover, and it was where the movement's crisis happened.

john the baptist — The wild man at the river, the prophet of repentance who baptised Jesus at the Jordan. The best-attested figure in the region at the moment, across multiple sources.

josephus — Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, author of *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. Our best outside source for the period. Read in a good annotated edition.

judas iscariot — One of the twelve, who betrayed Jesus to the authorities. The piece that does not fit a simple story. His motivation is not recoverable.

mark — The earliest Gospel, written around 70 CE. The source on which Matthew and Luke draw, along with a shared sayings source. The spare, urgent narrative that sets the shape for the later Gospels.

mary — Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her name is given in the Gospels; her later life is not well documented. In the Gospels after the early stories, she is not prominent.

mary magdalene — Mary of Magdala, a woman from whom seven demons had gone out, a follower of Jesus who provided for the ministry, a witness at the cross, a witness at the tomb, and the first person to whom the risen Jesus appears in John. Not a prostitute.

messiah — The Hebrew *mashiach*, "anointed one." A term available in Jesus' world for a figure expected by some to restore Israel. The reader should not assume a single fixed meaning.

nazareth — The village in Galilee where Jesus grew up. Around four hundred people, no synagogue we can find, no pavement, no coins minted in its name. The place the book opens and closes in.

pilate — Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 CE. The man who ordered Jesus' crucifixion. Not the figure the Gospels later painted — a reluctant official pressured by the crowd — but a prefect capable of violence, corruption, and contempt for Jewish sensibilities, as Philo and Josephus describe.

pharisee — A Jewish movement of the late second and first centuries BCE and CE, concerned with Torah, purity, and the relationship between Israel and God. Not the villains of a morality play. A Jewish movement in internal debate with Jesus, who cared about the same things.

passover — The pilgrimage festival commemorating the Exodus. The time when Jesus went to Jerusalem and when he was crucified. A time when Jerusalem's population multiplied and the Roman troops were on the porticoes.

paul — Saul of Tarsus, a Jew from Tarsus, a Pharisee according to his own account, a Roman citizen, and a persecutor of the early movement before his conversion by a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. The author of the earliest Christian letters, and the one whose missions to the Gentiles opened the movement to the wider Roman world.

philo — Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher who wrote a letter about Pilate that describes him as corrupt, violent, and contemptuous of Jewish sensibilities. Not the Pilate of the Gospels' softening.

sadducee — A Jewish group associated with the Temple priesthood and the Temple aristocracy, concerned with Temple and Torah, sceptical of the resurrection and the apocalyptic traditions. A power-holding group in Jerusalem.

sanhedrin — The Jewish council in Jerusalem, a body of leading Jews, with which the hearing before the high priest is associated. The historian is cautious about the Sanhedrin as a formal institution at this point.

sepphoris — A city in Galilee, four miles from Nazareth, rebuilt by Herod Antipas after 4 BCE. A site of building work that would have offered employment to a *tektōn* from Nazareth.

son of man — A term Jesus used of himself. The reader should not assume a single fixed meaning. The term has Danielic, apocalyptic, and self-designation uses, and the evidence does not close which of these was in Jesus' mind.

tektōn — A Greek word meaning builder, not romantic carpenter. A person who works with their hands on material that has to hold weight and take weather. A *tektōn* could work stone or wood or both.

torah — The Jewish law, the instruction of God. The term Jesus and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes all used. Not "legalism" but the instruction that structured Jewish life.

tetrarch — A ruler of a fourth part of a kingdom. The title Antipas held as ruler of Galilee and Perea.

judea — The southern province of the region, the seat of Roman administration, the place of Jerusalem and the Temple. The province Jesus walked into at the end.

wilderness — The desert landscape of the Jordan valley and the hills around it. The place where Jesus spent forty days after his baptism, and where Jewish men in that landscape and at that moment would have understood themselves to be in confrontation with what the mission would cost.

zealot — A member of a Jewish resistance movement against Roman rule. The reader should not assume that one of the twelve — Simon the Zealot — was a Zealot in the political sense, though the name is suggestive.

Further Reading

A guide to the sources and the scholarship for readers who want to go further. Primary sources are the raw material; secondary works are the historians who have spent their lives recovering the world Jesus walked through.

Primary sources

The documents that carry the story. Read them in a good annotated edition. None of them is a neutral transcript; all of them are shaped by the purposes of the communities that produced them. That is the condition of the evidence, and the reader who understands that goes further.

The Gospels

Mark — The earliest Gospel, written around 70 CE. Spare, urgent, shaped by the experience of the Jewish war. The source on which Matthew and Luke draw, along with a shared sayings source (often called Q). Mark's Jesus is a man of action who repeatedly tells people not to speak of what he has done. The spare style is not a limitation; it's a decision.

Matthew — Written in the 80s, using Mark and a shared sayings source. More concerned with Jesus as teacher and with the relationship between the new movement and the Jewish tradition. The birth story is here, and the Sermon on the Mount.

Luke — Written in the 80s, using Mark and the same sayings source as Matthew, plus material peculiar to Luke. More concerned with social margins — women, the poor, the outsider. The birth story here is different from Matthew's. The book of Acts is the same author's sequel.

John — The latest Gospel, most theological, sometimes preserving good geography and sometimes the least reliable on the sequence of events. A different kind of document from the synoptics. Not a commentary on them; a distinct witness with its own concerns.

Paul's letters

Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians — The earliest Christian documents we have, written in the 50s, decades before the Gospels. Almost uninterested in Jesus' life. Paul is interested in the meaning of the crucified and risen Jesus for communities living under pressure. What Paul does not say is as informative as what he does: he has almost nothing to say about Jesus' teaching, his miracles, or the events of his ministry. For the historian, Paul is not a source for Jesus' biography but a source for the earliest layers of the movement's memory and the belief that something had happened.

Other early Christian writing

Gospel of Thomas — A collection of sayings, some parallel to the canonical Gospels, some not. The date is contested; some scholars place it early, some late. Worth reading for the sayings tradition it preserves, worth treating cautiously for the dating it implies.

Outside sources

Josephus, *The Jewish War and Antiquities of the Jews* — The best outside source for the period. Josephus writes as a Jewish aristocrat who ended up working for Rome, and his account of the late first century is indispensable and complicated. The passages on John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus, and the situation in Judea are the ones the historian returns to. Read in a good annotated edition; don't take him second-hand.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 — A single passage, in a work about the emperors Nero and Tiberius. Tacitus mentions that Christus was executed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius, and that the movement spread from Judea to Rome. Sparse but significant: Roman testimony, hostile, and independent of the Christian tradition.

Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* — A letter about Pilate that describes him as corrupt, violent, and contemptuous of Jewish sensibilities. Not the Pilate of the Gospels' softening. Philo is writing about the same Pilate the historian needs to know.

Pliny the Younger, letter to Trajan (c. 112 CE) — A letter from a Roman governor in Bithynia asking how to treat Christians. Evidence for the spread of the movement and the shape of early Christian practice, not for Jesus' life. Useful for understanding what the movement had become within a generation of the crucifixion.

Secondary works

The historians below are not in order of importance — that order does not exist — but in rough order of what they do for the reader of this book. Sanders is the best starting point; Meier is the reference work to have on hand; Allison is the book that teaches the reader how to think about uncertainty honestly.

The starting points

E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* — The best single starting point. Sanders lays out what can be said with confidence, what can be said with less confidence, and what cannot be said, and he does it in a way that is accessible without being loose. The book that most directly shaped the stance of this one.

Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* — The Jewish Galilean holy man frame. Vermes insisted on reading Jesus inside Jewish categories and against the Jewish landscape, long before that became a broadly shared assumption. The book that taught a generation to stop reading Jesus as if Judaism were not the air he breathed.

The serious reconstructions

John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* — Exhaustive. A multi-volume work that reads like reference rather than like a continuous argument, but the detail is unmatched. Use it to check a question, not to read cover to cover. The most careful historian working in the tradition.

Dale Allison, *Constructing Jesus* — The most intellectually honest book on what memory can and cannot deliver. Allison takes the problem of reconstruction seriously — not as a methodological

inconvenience to be overcome, but as a limit to be lived within. Essential for the book's voice of uncertainty.

Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* — The best account of the Passover politics and why Pilate acted. Fredriksen reads the crucifixion as a political act in a city at festival, and she reads Pilate as the prefect Josephus and Philo describe, not as the reluctant official of the Gospels. Essential for Part Five.

Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew* — The corrective on anti-Jewish reading habits. Levine shows, passage by passage, where two millennia of retelling have baked in assumptions that the historian cannot live with. Read early; it will change your sentences. The book treats the Pharisees as a Jewish movement in internal debate, not as the villains of a morality play.

The counterweights

N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* — The confessional-but-serious counterweight. Wright reads the Judaism of the period and the apocalyptic expectation of Jesus with real seriousness, and he argues for a reconstruction that is more confident about what Jesus thought he was doing than the prevailing scholarship. Read him as a challenge to the uncertainty, and decide whether the challenge holds.

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* — The peasant-Cynic reading. Crossan reads Jesus as a peasant wisdom teacher in the tradition of Mediterranean Cynicism, and the book is as much about method as about Jesus. The reader won't buy all of it; include it anyway, because the peasant context is right and the argument about social location matters.

The clear voices

Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* — Clear on the end-times frame. Ehrman reads Jesus as an apocalypticist who expected God to act soon, and he does not flinch from the implications. The book that most directly handles the finding in chapter 19.

Helen Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed and Pontius Pilate* — Bond's guide is a good second read after Sanders; her work on Pilate is the historian's Pilate, stripped of the Gospel softening and read against Philo and Josephus.

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* — The case for early testimony. Bauckham argues that the Gospels are closer to the events and to living memory than the conventional dating allows. The argument is contested, but it is serious and it deserves engagement, not dismissal.

James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* — Oral tradition done properly. Dunn works through the mechanisms by which the Jesus tradition could have been preserved in oral form across the decades before the Gospels, and the result is a serious account of the interval between Jesus' life and the written sources.

The indispensable specialist

Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* — Short, brutal, indispensable for Part Five. Hengel's book is a detailed study of the method, what it was for, what it did to a body, how long it took, who watched. It does not let the reader look away. The chapter on the cross stands on this book's ground.

Archaeology and context

Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land* — The readable archaeological survey of the period. Magness writes archaeology for the reader who wants ground under their feet, and the book is useful for the chapters on Jerusalem, the Temple, and the material world of the region.

Mark Chancey on Galilee — Chancey's work on Galilee in the late Second Temple period is the specialist's specialist, and it returns repeatedly to the mixed population, the Hellenistic and Roman presence, and the building boom that made a *tektōn*'s life possible.

Sean Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean* — The specialist study of Galilee and the Jesus movement in its Galilean setting. Freyne's work on the geography, the economy, and the social structure of the region is the ground the book stands on for chapters 1 through 10.

The editions

Josephus in a good annotated edition — The Loeb Classical Library editions are the standard. Read him yourself; don't take him second-hand. The annotations matter — Josephus is a writer who needs them.

The New Testament in a good annotated translation — The translator's notes are part of the text for the reader of this book. Pick an edition that tells you what the Greek says and what it might mean, and treat the translation as a decision, not a fact.

This is a starting list, not a closing argument. The historian who reads these will find more in their footnotes than in their conclusions, and that is where the real work lives.

Maps

Nine image plates were planned for this book, tracing the geography of Jesus's life from the villages of Galilee to the Temple courts of Jerusalem. Eight of the nine are reproduced below, each sourced from a public-domain or Creative-Commons-licensed original identified on Wikimedia Commons, with full credit and licence. Figures 7 and 9 share a single source plan, noted where it happens.

Figure 1: Lower Galilee in the Roman period, with Nazareth on its ridge and Sepphoris — Herod Antipas's rebuilt capital — four miles to the north, and the Sea of Galilee visible to the east. A *tektōn* from Nazareth could walk to work in Sepphoris and back in a day. From "Galilee & Surrounding District (50–70 A.D.)," Edward Stanford Ltd., London, in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Josephus, *The Jewish War*, vol. II (1927). (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 2: Nazareth, Sepphoris (labelled by its later name Diocaesarea), and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, showing the short distances between the village and the two building-boom cities that employed Galilean *tektōnes* like Joseph and Jesus. From William R. Shepherd, *The Historical Atlas* (1923). (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 3: The Sea of Galilee, surveyed by Lieutenants C. W. Anderson and Horatio Kitchener for the Palestine Exploration Fund's Survey of Western Palestine. The map shows the lakeside villages of the western shore — Magdala ("El Mejdel"), Tiberias — and, across the water, the Decapolis cities of Gadara and Gamala: the lake as the highway around which Jesus's Galilean ministry moved. (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons — National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Cartographic Collection.)

Figure 4: The synagogue ruins at Capernaum. The visible white limestone building is a later, Byzantine-period reconstruction; excavation has found a basalt synagogue of the right first-century date beneath it, along with a nearby house of the same period that later tradition identified as the house of Peter. Neither identification is archaeologically provable — the site is consistent with the Gospel tradition, not proof of it. Photograph by David Shankbone. (Image: David Shankbone, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 5: Palestine in the time of Christ, showing the geography of the journey south — from Galilee down through the Jordan Valley to Jericho, then up into the hill country to Jerusalem. Inset: Jerusalem and its immediate vicinity. From Barton W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament* (1891). (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 6: A plan of Jerusalem and its environs at the time of Jesus, by the French cartographer Auguste Henri Dufour (1798–1865), showing the city's quarters (Bezetha, Acra, Sion, Ophel), the Temple platform, the walls, and the Kidron valley and Mount of Olives to the east — with Gethsemane, Bethphage, and Bethany marked along the pilgrim approach. (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons — National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Cartographic Collection.)

Figure 7: A plan of Herod's Temple and its courts, showing the sanctuary and inner courts at the centre and the Court of the Gentiles — the outer court, the only part of the Temple precinct open to non-Jews — surrounding it, with the Royal Porch (Solomon's Porch) along the southern end. This is a scholarly reconstruction, not a surviving ancient plan — no first-century architectural drawing of the Temple survives. From the *Dictionary of the Bible* (1909), reprinted in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition (1911). (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 8: A reconstruction of Jerusalem in the time of Herod, viewed from the east — the vantage of a pilgrim descending the Mount of Olives, crossing the Kidron valley, and climbing into the city. The Temple platform dominates the skyline. This is an artist's reconstruction rather than an excavation plan, useful for the sense of approach and scale it conveys rather than as an architectural record. Published by MacCalla & Co., Philadelphia. (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons — National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Cartographic Collection.)

Figure 9: The Court of the Gentiles, the great outer court of Herod's Temple, where pilgrims changed money into Temple currency and bought sacrificial animals — and where Jesus, according to the Gospels, overturned the tables. This is the same plan as Figure 7 (a second, distinct plan of the Temple courts illustrating specifically the money-changers' area could not be located in the public domain); it is repeated here because it is the clearest surviving reconstruction of the court where the action described in this chapter took place. (Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons — from the *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1909, reprinted in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1911.)