

# The emerging Jewish views of the messiahship of Jesus and their bearing on the question of his resurrection

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This article surveys the beliefs of Jewish scholars who have written about the historical Jesus. Specifically, it explores the modern Jewish scholarship on the person and role of the Messiah and how this relates to the study of the resurrection of Jesus. Many of the traditional beliefs about the messiah preclude a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus. However, with more understanding of the background of Second-Temple Judaism, many long-held beliefs about the messiah are being re-evaluated. The three main issues discussed in this article are the concept of a pagan messiah, the death of the messiah and the possibility of a divine messiah.

## Introduction

The role of the Messiah has a long and winding history in Jewish tradition. The word has meant different things at different times, and there is quite a bit of leeway regarding interpretation (Patai 1979; Schiffman 1987). In the popular Jewish understanding, however, there have been some constants. Most noticeably, the Jewish idea of the Messiah is decidedly different, indeed antithetical, to the picture of Jesus as presented in the New Testament.

This has been a major obstacle in the Jewish study of Jesus. The ultimate question – whether or not Jesus arose from the dead – is often dismissed, or at least hidden, based on the assumption that Jesus does not meet the proper qualifications as a messianic candidate. What is more, if he does not fit the job description, it is often reasoned, the rest of his résumé means very little.

Modern scholarship, however, has been adding new dimensions to this discussion. Some long-entrenched beliefs are being re-evaluated with the recognition that they are not nearly as ancient or binding as previously thought. This article will address three common presuppositions about the nature and role of the Messiah, the changing Jewish views of these issues in recent years and their relevance for the study of the resurrection of Jesus. It seeks to demonstrate that these presuppositions in themselves are no longer legitimate reasons to dismiss the study of the resurrection.

## Paul and Pagan influences

The most basic characteristic of the Messiah is that he must be a Jew. In this respect, virtually all scholars would agree that Jesus fits the bill. Only those who have a perverse disposition to say otherwise would disagree (Heschel 2008). Whether or not the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus fits into a Jewish framework is, however, a completely different question. A popular argument in the 19th and most of the 20th century says that Paul created Christianity by adding pagan elements to the original Jewish message of Jesus.

Jewish scholars picked up on this as well. It allowed scholars to accept Jesus as a Jew whilst keeping Paul and 'Christianity' at a distance. Paul's Jewishness was often considered suspect at best. This would reach its apex in the writings of Hyam Maccoby in the 1980s. Maccoby was a controversial figure in his day, but as will be seen below, he continues to have influence today. According to him, Paul not only borrowed from paganism, he was thoroughly immersed in it (Maccoby 1986:100). The title of Maccoby's most provocative book leaves no question as to his perspective: *The mythmaker: Paul and the invention of Christianity*. Whereas Jesus was a Pharisaic rabbi, he argues, Paul was something altogether different (Maccoby 1986:15).

Maccoby relies heavily on the 4th-century writer Epiphanius, who cited the Ebionites as saying that Paul had no Pharisaic background or training (Maccoby 1986:17). Maccoby continues down this road and makes an even stronger case. Paul's theology about atonement, he reasons, was borrowed from both Gnosticism and the mystery religions (Maccoby 1986:16). These would be intermingled with verses from traditional Jewish scripture, and Paul's letters are used to validate

this claim. 'There is nothing in Paul's writing to prove that he was a Pharisee,' he writes, 'and much to prove that he was not' (Maccoby 1986:71).

Paul's very identity is questioned as well. Again following the Ebionites, Maccoby viewed Paul as a convert to Judaism, who took the name Saul and 'invented' his genealogy of being from the tribe of Benjamin. This was a 'sheer bluff', which Gentile converts would not be able to confirm or deny. Paul's parents were actually Gentiles who never fully converted to Judaism (Maccoby 1986:96). They were God-fearers, and because of this, Paul did have some instruction in Judaism when he was young. Later in life, he attempted to live as a Pharisee. He failed at this, becoming only '... a member of the High Priest's band of armed thugs' (Maccoby 1986:99). This biographical information is key to understanding Paul's metamorphosis. Paul's Damascus experience, then, is 'psychologically and socially understandable' (Maccoby 1986:95) when these facts are recognised.

It is not surprising that Christian scholars found this theory difficult to embrace. John T. Pawlikowski thought it had too much conjecture and too little evidence supporting it. 'His rather psychological description of the Damascus-road conversion sounds as though Maccoby was a personal confidant of Paul', he wrote. 'Thus, this volume cannot be accepted as a serious scholarly contribution' (Pawlikowski 1986:1041). Jewish scholars were critical as well. Reform Jewish leader, Ellis Rivkin (1989), wrote the following:

But Maccoby's evidence is hard to take seriously. It rests on an account of Paul by a fourth-century chronicler, Parhanianus, who drew his portrait of Paul from a hostile Ebionite source – a source which Maccoby, himself, admits is wholly unreliable. To sweep away Paul's own impassioned listing of his Pharisaic bona-fides in favor of a fourth-century disfigurement is thus to fly in the face of sound critical scholarship and simple common sense. (p. 226)

In his next book, *Paul and Hellenism*, Maccoby continues where he left off. All of Paul's theology is given pagan origins. The death of Jesus as a means of salvation, for example, was prefigured in the stories about Dionysus, Osiris, Adonis, Attis and Orpheus (Maccoby 1991:65). Maccoby's main point was to show how antithetical all of this is to true Judaism. This line of reasoning was already waning even amongst critical scholars by the time Maccoby wrote. Amy-Jill Levine thought his views were too one-sided. She acknowledged the possibility of some pagan influence in Paul's writing. Contemporary Jewish texts offer the 'building blocks' for some of these ideas as well. 'Moreover', she continues, 'that Jews would have accepted Jesus as their Messiah, suggests that such Christological claims were not entirely alien to their world view' (Levine 1995:231). Alan Segal's (1991) response was even more direct:

It is difficult to show that any mystery religion directly worshipping a dying and reviving God, whose death is salvific, predates Christianity. We have few texts that can be identified as

using mystery vocabulary ... It is clear that Maccoby concentrates on this long abandoned aspect of Pauline research to further his polemic against Christianity. (p. 1)

In the wider arena of New-Testament scholarship, the pagan Paul was becoming an increasingly anachronistic figure. Contemporary Pauline scholarship makes a point of placing him in the context of Second-Temple Judaism. Books by E.P. Sanders (1977) and James Dunn (1999) are credited with pioneering this wave. What emerged is known as *The new perspective on Paul*. It presents a radically new paradigm that has branched out in several directions. The recognition of his Jewishness has been an important step for scholarship all around, although some of the key nuances of the new perspective may be greatly challenged (Carson, O'Brien & Seifrid 2004).

The specifically Jewish scholarship on Paul has been diverse as well. In the last 20 years, there has been a new understanding and appreciation of his Jewishness. At the same time, accusations about pagan origins remain. Both views are represented, but there does seem to be a pattern. Those who are doing ground-breaking and extensive scholarly work on Paul's theology (Boyarin 1997; Eisenbaum 2012; Nanos 1996; Segal 1991) have been concluding that Paul can only be understood in a thoroughly Jewish context. Conversely, those who maintain belief in pagan influences for Paul are usually writing more overtly polemical or popular works where Maccoby remains the authority.

David Klinghoffer is one example of this latter category as seen in his bestselling book, *Why the Jews rejected Jesus*. He notices the verses where Paul affirms his Jewishness (Ac 22:3; Phlp 3:5-6) and wonders why Paul felt the need to be so insistent. He writes: 'What does this Pharisee of Pharisees, this Hebrew of Hebrews, feel he needs to prove, and why?' (Klinghoffer 2005:95)? Klinghoffer (2005:96) questions Paul's upbringing in Tarsus, his ancestral connection to the tribe of Benjamin and his ability to read Hebrew. Paul's theology is also exposed as non-Jewish. However, this is not just his opinion. Klinghoffer makes reference to Epiphanius, the one who documented the Ebionites' view that Paul was not Jewish. The footnote (Klinghoffer 2005::231, n. 73) cites Maccoby's book *The mythmaker* as the only source. Klinghoffer continues, saying that no one ever doubted Jesus' Jewishness, but the Epiphanius passage indicates that Jews who observed the commandments (meaning the Ebionites) 'found something suspect about Paul's Jewishness' (Klinghoffer 2005:115).

Shmuel Boteach's book, *Kosher Jesus*, continues in the same vein. His view of Jesus is 'profoundly shaped' by Maccoby, whose name is frequently cited (Boteach 2012:xi). For example: 'It is even possible, as Hyam Maccoby maintains, that Paul was not born Jewish but converted' (Boteach 2012:117). This book was also a bestseller and has therefore contributed to the tenacity of the belief in pagan influences for Paul.

Rabbi Michael Cook relies less on Maccoby but nevertheless leans in the same direction. He teaches New Testament at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Cook 2008:xiv). Whilst he is presumably aware of the modern scholarship on the Jewishness of Paul, his 2008 book, *Modern Jews engage the New Testament*, explains the origins of the new movement as the result of pagan influences. These include cultic lords such as Mithras, Osiris, Tammuz, Attis and Adonis and especially the concept of 'springtime-resurrections' (Cook 2008:36). For Cook, Paul's Jewishness is at best a non-issue.

The Jewish reclamation of Paul is a work in progress (Langton 2010). In the popular imagination, his writings are more likely to be labelled pagan than Jewish. This makes it easier to dismiss the question of the resurrection as merely a borrowed ideology rather than an event that may be examined historically. However, amongst scholars, such notions are largely a thing of the past. Those who choose to affirm the pagan view can no longer accept it as a given. It must be either defended in light of recent scholarship or abandoned.

## A dead Messiah

The notion of a suffering and dying messiah has a unique place in Jewish history. A new round of debate erupted from the ranks of the Chabad movement of Hassidic Judaism. Their leader, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, had been rumoured to be the Messiah. His death in 1994 did not cancel this belief, and in fact, the movement continued to grow (Heilman & Friedman 2010). Even today – over 20 years later – his picture is posted all over Israel as many believe that he is the messiah. For many, this claim goes well beyond the boundaries of acceptable Jewish belief. Orthodox Rabbi, David Berger, was outraged at both the claim itself and the fact that other religious Jews were not more concerned. He says that '... there is no more fundamental messianic belief in Judaism than the conviction that the Davidic Messiah who appears at the end of days will not die before completing his mission' (Berger 2001:11–12). Surely, this would make the resurrection of Jesus a moot point as far as Jewish interest.

This brings us to Isaiah 53, the most heavily disputed passage in the Jewish-Christian discussion. Several places in the New Testament cite it as pointing to Jesus (Mt 8:17; Ac 8:32–33; 1 Pt 2:22). Traditional Judaism has had mixed interpretations. The two dominant views are that it speaks of the messiah or that it speaks metaphorically about the nation of Israel as a whole. The messianic interpretation appears early in the Rabbinic period, in the Talmud and Midrashim, and the idea that it refers to the people of Israel does not appear in a Jewish text until several centuries later. The history of these competing views has been well rehearsed (Bellinger & Farmer 1998; Bock & Glaser 2012; Driver & Neubauer 1969; Stuhlmacher & Janowski 2004).

Joel E. Rembaum documented the shifting nature of these interpretations in a 1982 article in *Harvard Theological Review*.

He wanted to demonstrate that Jewish interpretation was not only influenced by aspects of the Christian view but that Jewish interpretations incorporated Christian themes, re-tuned, into their exegesis. The Rabbinic literature on Isaiah 53 is limited compared to the volumes written in the Middle Ages. This, he says, had more to do with the types of commentaries that were written in each period. However, the content is undeniable: 'The servant as messiah is the dominant theme in the rabbinic sources' (Rembaum 1982:291). Ironically, the first documented reference of Isaiah 53 as possibly referring to the nation of Israel comes from a Christian source and not a Jewish one. The Church Father, Origen, writing in the early 3rd century, mentions this as a Jewish objection to the messiahship of Jesus. This appears in *Contra Celsum* 1.55 (Rembaum 1982:292).

Rembaum sees three factors that led to Judaism's shift away from the messianic interpretation and towards the national interpretation. The first was a response to Christian propaganda that said that the exile is punishment. This created the Jewish belief that, in exile, the Jews were actually functioning as a 'light to the nations'. The second was in response to Christian missionising. Because of this, most Jews responded by 'avoiding the messianic interpretation altogether' (Rembaum 1982:294). The third was in response to the Crusades. In the midst of the terrible situation, Isaiah 53 came to be seen as the Jewish people, whose suffering 'was part of the divine plan' (Rembaum 1982:294). Rashi, in the eleventh century, makes use of these factors and incorporates them into his commentary of Isaiah 53 (Rembaum 1982:292–295). Rembaum (1982) concluded the following:

The continuous interfacing between Judaism and Christianity has resulted in a constant process of ideological cross-fertilization. Through this process, an idea gleaned from the rival tradition has served to reinvigorate and perpetuate the rivalry. The Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 53 surveyed above, with their emphasis on universally efficacious, vicarious suffering and atonement, exemplify this ironic fact of history. (p. 310)

The idea that Rashi was the first Jewish commentator to offer the national interpretation has since been challenged. A few texts have been uncovered which push the date back at least a couple of hundred years. According to Elliott Horowitz (2012:434), these include 'Hebrew liturgical poems composed in Italy' which may have influenced Rashi, and one 'Arabic biblical commentary composed in the Middle East'. However, these additional manuscripts do little to change the argument. The messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 is still found in the earliest and most authoritative Jewish texts.

This may be contested in the Jewish community on a popular level, but scholars are well aware of it. As Daniel Boyarin (2012) wrote, the national interpretation of Isaiah 53 has not been the dominant one:

Quite the contrary, we now know that many Jewish authorities, maybe even most, until nearly the modern period have read Isaiah 53 as being about the Messiah; until the last few centuries, the allegorical interpretation was a minority. (p. 152)

Exactly how this new scholarly concession will affect the Jewish study of Jesus – and particularly his resurrection – is unclear. It does not mean that Jesus is the Messiah any more than it means that Menachem Schneerson is the Messiah. It does, however, obliterate a common obstacle. It may cause some scholars to be more comfortable with the New Testament's claims about the death and resurrection of Jesus as a potentially Jewish concept. This may lead to a new surge in scholarship in this area. In contrast, the acknowledgement of a dead Messiah within Judaism might simply produce *different* reasons to dismiss the candidacy of Jesus.

Israel Knohl of the Hebrew University (Knohl 2000) writes about newly discovered texts that perhaps originated in the generation before Jesus. His texts include *The messiah before Jesus: The suffering servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Knohl 2000). He argues that Jesus really did regard himself as the messiah and that he also expected to be rejected, killed and resurrected after three days, based on previous Jewish ideas found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nine years later, Knohl wrote, *The Gabriel revelation*, which was the name of an apocalyptic text written at the turn of the 1st century. It also allegedly spoke of dying and a resurrection after three days. The discovery, he writes (Knohl 2000:xi), was dramatic, and would '... change the way we view the historical Jesus and the birth of Christianity'.

Scholars have questioned a number of Knohl's conclusions, and apparently, he himself has admitted that the 'three day' translation is not accurate (Elgvin 2014:5). For our purposes here, what is important is how Knohl uses this information in response to Jesus. With minimal interaction with either the New Testament or the historical Jesus, he provides an alternative scenario. The 'inner struggle' in Jesus' soul, he writes, reached a climax. He pleaded with God but ultimately chose to stay on course. In the end, Jesus '... opted to stay in Jerusalem and follow the path of suffering, death and resurrection on the third day, a messianic path devised in *The Gabriel revelation*' (Knohl 2009:93). It is not clear how this scenario argues against an actual resurrection, but that seems to be Knohl's point.

This is an interesting turn of events. The acknowledgement of the Jewishness of a dying and rising messiah *and* the denial of such a belief have both been used to dismiss a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus. In both cases, however, the evidence has been equally ineffectual.

## Divine Messiah

The most definitive theological boundary marker between Judaism and Christianity is the incarnation and the related concept of the trinity. The claim that Jesus is both human and divine is, for many, a deal breaker in the attempt to harmonise the two traditions. It dismisses his potential messianic candidacy and, therefore, the relevance of the question of his resurrection.

However, recent scholarship has brought unexpected light to this discussion. A number of Christian scholars have

studied the boundaries of monotheism in the 1st century in an attempt to better understand the New Testament's claims (Bauckham 2008; Hengel 1976; Hurtado 2005; Newman, Davila & Lewis 1999). Jewish scholars have also addressed the question, usually in the context of Jewish-Christian relationships (Goshen-Gottstein 2002; Katz 1971; Kister 2006; Neusner 1988; Redman 1994; Wolfson 2002).

Three Jewish scholars in particular have offered remarkably positive studies of the incarnation of Jesus, concluding that the concept is not foreign to Judaism. They will be discussed here. Interestingly, they represent three different fields of study. These include philosophy, Tenakh and Second-Temple Judaism.

Michael Wyschogrod has studied the incarnation more than most other Jewish scholars (Wyschogrod 1986; 1993). He approaches the subject as a modern orthodox Jew and as a participant in Jewish-Christian dialogue. His main theological grid concerns God's election and indwelling with Israel. This covers virtually all areas of his theology, as seen in his classic work *The body of faith*. (Wyschogrod 1983). The article that will be surveyed here (Wyschogrod 1996) addresses the incarnation and its potential relevance for Judaism.

Because of the other factors of the Jewish-Christian debate, Judaism '... has never really investigated this issue soberly' (Wyschogrod 1996:198). Wyschogrod (1996:198) boldly seeks to evaluate the incarnation on its own terms and not through the lens of '... two thousand years of tragic history'. He begins by stating that Jewish hostility towards Jesus began over the issues of Messiahship and the Law. On top of these already thorny issues, the idea of Jesus' divinity changed the debate dramatically, elevating it over the years from 'reservations' to 'absolute rift' (Wyschogrod 1996:199).

He cites two common Jewish responses to the divinity of Jesus. The first is biblical and includes the problem of idolatry. This is subdivided into two parts. Idolatry may take the form of serving other gods. This means spiritual beings that have supernatural power although inferior to the one true God of Abraham (Wyschogrod 1996:200). Idolatry may also appear in what Wyschogrod terms the 'sticks and stones' dimension. This refers to attributing divinity to material objects such as the golden calves (Wyschogrod 1996:200).

The second response is philosophical. Maimonides, Wyschogrod (1996:201) writes, was particularly weary of assigning any corporeal attributes to God. It is because God is absolute that Maimonides strongly rejected the idea of corporeal attributes. He did notice a number of examples in the Tenakh that present the corporeal attributes of God, but these he believed should not be interpreted literally. In fact, he said that those who attribute corporeality to God are heretics. In contradiction to this, Wyschogrod affirms that the Bible does assign corporeal attributes to God. As examples,



he refers to passages where God dwells in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple and Jerusalem (Wyschogrod 1996:203).

The God of Israel is therefore both transcendent and active in our world. Such a belief helps bridge the gap between Judaism and Christianity, at least in terms of possibilities. Wyschogrod (1996) does not rule out Christianity's claim of incarnation. It is not something that can be negated by biblical or logical principles:

If we can determine a priori that God could not appear in the form of a man or, to put it in more Docetic terms, that there could never be a being who is both fully God and fully human, then we are substituting a philosophical scheme for the sovereignty of God. No Biblically oriented, responsible Jewish theologian can accept such a substitution of an ontological structure for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose actions humanity cannot predict and whose actions are not subject to an overreaching logical necessity to which they must conform. (p. 204)

This understanding, Wyschogrod realises, may appear to have 'diminished' the differences between Judaism and Christianity, although this is not necessarily the case. He (Wyschogrod 1996) continues as follows:

The fact remains that Judaism did not encounter Jesus either as the Messiah or as God and therefore a difference remains about what God did do even if not about what God could have done. (p. 205)

Having said this, the reader might expect a discussion of what actually happened or whether or not an incarnation, which could happen, actually did happen in the person of Jesus. Wyschogrod does, however, not enter into that discussion. Instead, he focuses on the Jewish rejection of Jesus. He is viewing the issue through the lens of ecclesiology. Jews and Gentiles interpret things differently. The 'Gentile Christianity' that became the dominant and then only branch of the church, he writes, had neglected a prominent aspect of theology, namely the election of Israel. Wyschogrod acknowledges that Paul spoke of this in Romans 9–11 and that Jesus originally preached to his own Jewish people. He argues that '... Jesus must not be separated from the Jewish people because he did not wish to separate himself from them' (Wyschogrod 1996:206).

He then proposes that Christian theology must rethink its view of the Jewish people. Traditionally, the Church has held two basic views on this topic. The dominant one has been supersessionism, which says that the Church is the new Israel. The other view is based on Romans 9–11 and says that Israel has not lost its national election. Wyschogrod (1996:207) argues that this view would necessitate that '... Jewish Christians retain their identity'. This is not necessarily an endorsement of Messianic Jews but a point stressing consistency to the New Testament's message.

The incarnation is ultimately placed within the matrix of Jewish-Christian relationships. Jesus was a Jewish man, but he was also more than that. In Wyschogrod's (1996:207) words, 'The church found God in this Jewish flesh'. This

was possible, he says, because God dwells in all Jewish flesh, based on Israel's covenant and election. Perhaps, he (Wyschogrod 1996) continues to ponder, 'the church' was not able to recognise God dwelling in the midst of all Israel but was somehow able to recognise God dwelling in this one individual Jew. Wyschogrod's understanding of God dwelling in Jesus is not exactly the same as the New Testament's, but it is perhaps an important step coming from an Orthodox Jewish scholar. For him, it seems to be a given that Jews should not believe in Jesus, but the incarnation is not a factor in this rejection.

Another profoundly important work on the subject comes from Benjamin Sommer, professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. These credentials place him fully within both the mainstream of Jewish thought, and the highest level of scholarship. His book is a major challenge to the traditional Jewish understanding of monotheism, as expressed in the opening statement: 'The God of the Hebrew Bible has a body, this must be stated at the outset, because so many people, including many scholars, assume otherwise' (Sommer 2009:1).

He sees evidence for his thesis throughout the Tenakh. Some of these passages '... point toward a non-material anthropomorphism', he says, but others '... reflect a more concrete conception of God's body' (Sommer 2009:2). The fact that God cannot be seen is often taken to mean He has no body. He argues, however, that Exodus 33:20 says that no one can see God and live. This does not mean that God has no physical form. There are also references that explicitly say that God was seen (Gn 3:8–9; Ex 33:11; Is 6:1, 5; Am 9:1). Many scholars tend to avoid, or at best downplay, such passages. It is a common problem: '[T]he habit of assuming that because we all know the Hebrew Bible's God has no body, evidence to the contrary must be denied or, if that is not possible, explained away' (Sommer 2009:5).

Sommer defines the term body as '... something located in a particular place at a particular time, whatever its shape or substance' (Sommer 2009:80). Common words found in the Scriptures, such as glory (*kavod*) and name (*shem*) provide unique opportunities to explain God dwelling amongst his people (Sommer 2009:58–60). The Tabernacle and the Temple are also obvious examples of this. Later, in the rabbinic period, the notion of the *Shekhinah* is employed to suggest '... something resembling the multiplicity of divine embodiment' (Sommer 2009:127). Jewish mysticism adds to the discussion as well. The concept of the *sephiroth* in Kabbalah reveals that '... the divine can fragment itself into multiple selves that nonetheless remain parts of a unified whole' (Sommer 2009:129).

At the end of the book, he approaches practical considerations, including the relationship of all this with Christianity. Despite all that has been said so far, his ultimate stance is quite traditional. Jews, he says, should repudiate Christianity



because it includes a commitment to one who has been deemed by Judaism as a false messiah (Sommer 2009:135). As with Wyschogrod, the big problem is not the incarnation per se. It is the further step of Christianity's '... revival of a dying and rising god, a category ancient Israel rejects' (Sommer 2009:136). This seems just as dismissive as the people he argued against (above) who invalidated the incarnation because of what is commonly assumed. Ancient Israel certainly did reject pagan deities, but it would need to be demonstrated that the specific concept of resurrection was the reason for that rejection.

The incarnation of Jesus is not a problem for Sommer, and it does not go beyond Jewish boundaries. God is able to be in more than one place at a time. 'That a deity came down did not mean the deity did not remain up,' he writes. 'The presence of God and of God-as-Jesus on earth is nothing more than a particular form of this old idea of multiple embodiment' (Sommer 2009:133). He (Sommer 2009) continues:

No Jew sensitive to Judaism's own classical sources, however, can fault the theological model Christianity employs when it avows belief in a God who has an earthly body as well as a Holy Spirit and a heavenly manifestation, for that model, we have seen, is a perfectly Jewish one. (p. 135)

Daniel Boyarin has also studied the boundaries of monotheism in his book, *The Jewish Gospels*. Jesus was a Jewish man. This is not a controversial statement. However, Boyarin attempts to go beyond this commonly held view and to enter a more daring thesis. He writes: 'I wish us to see that Christ too – the Divine Messiah – is a Jew. Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not – until much later – an anti-Jewish discourse at all' (Boyarin 2012:6).

He begins with some definitions. Whilst many people have assumed that 'Son of God' was a reference to divinity and 'Son of man' a reference to humanity, Boyarin turns this on its head. The former term actually indicates Jesus as the King Messiah, the latter one is a reference to divinity (Boyarin 2012:26). Daniel 7 is an important antecedent for the use of this term, as is 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. Each of these and their parallels to the Gospels are discussed in detail.

Throughout the book, Boyarin takes many of the New Testament claims at face value. He does not affirm or deny historical claims until the final few pages. Like Sommer, Boyarin accepts the Jewishness of quite a bit of New Testament theology, but stops short at the resurrection. He first says that the resurrection '... seems to me so unlikely as to be incredible' (Boyarin 2012:159). In his view, the resurrection and the disciples' experiences are not what actually happened (Boyarin 2012:160). However, in the spirit of pluralism, he does not want to invalidate the faith of others who believe this. He (Boyarin 2012) therefore adds the following in a footnote:

Let me make myself clear here: I am not denying the validity of the religious Christian view of matters. That is surely a matter of faith, not scholarship. I am denying it as a historical, scholarly, critical explanation' (p. 160)

Perhaps some of Jesus' followers, he writes, 'saw him arisen'. However, this 'must be' because they had a narrative that caused that expectation (Boyarin 2012:160). Jesus fulfils the role of both the divine figure from Daniel and the Messianic King. The real Jesus, he believes – prophet, magician, charismatic teacher – was transformed by the belief, whether his own or that of the people, that he was the coming one. Boyarin (2012) concludes:

Details of his life, his prerogatives, his powers, and even his suffering and death before triumph are all developed out of close midrashic reading of the biblical materials and fulfilled in his life and death. The exaltation and resurrection experiences of his followers are a product of the narrative, not a cause of it. (p. 160)

Like Knohl, he acknowledged and reclaimed a doctrine that has been widely considered alien to Judaism, only to use it to counter the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. His theory, like Knohl's, remains distant from the historical context. The only argument against the resurrection that he offers is that it seems 'incredible' to him. This is a worldview assumption, not an argument based on history or scholarship, which was his stated reason for not believing it.

## Conclusion

The above discussion attempted to demonstrate that common Jewish presuppositions about the Messiah can no longer be used as a pretext to invalidate a discussion about the resurrection of Jesus. The belief that Jesus' resurrection is either borrowed from or inspired by pagan mythology is simply outdated. At the same time, the concept of a Messiah who dies *is* increasingly recognised as a part of traditional Judaism.

The incarnation presents a different challenge. It does not change the historical reality of whether or not Jesus rose from the dead, but it is an obstacle. It remains the epitome of a non-Jewish idea. Based on the pre-imminence of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4), any perceived threat to monotheism is the most serious of all charges. The New Testament does not speak against this. In fact, in Mark 12:28–29, Jesus says that the *Shema* is the greatest commandment of all. However, there is much more than theology at stake. It is a boundary marker. Jewish atheists are still considered part of the fold whilst Jews who believe in the incarnation of Jesus are not (Novak 1991).

The last century has seen radical changes in both Jewish and Christian understandings of many things. Views about pagan influences on Paul or the Jewishness of a dying messiah have radically changed (at least in scholarly circles) in recent years as well. Whether or not the new, pioneering work on the boundaries of Jewish monotheism will one day be in a similar category remains to be seen. The scholarship in this area cited above is in its infancy. For now, it may still easily be brushed aside as a novelty or an oddity, given the overwhelming historic position on this issue in the Jewish community.

Such a dismissal would be unfortunate. Sommer's work on the Tenakh is ground-breaking and nothing less than paradigm-shifting. Boyarin's work will specifically be of interest to Jewish New-Testament scholars. Its importance is not necessarily because of his specific conclusions. A number of these may be challenged. Rather, his willingness to follow the evidence even when it goes beyond the traditional boundaries is not only commendable, it is absolutely vital for the advancement of scholarship itself. As Paula Eisenbaum concluded in her review of Boyarin's book, '[T]he opportunity to acknowledge overlap and resonance with another faith once conceived in diametrical opposition would not be a bad thing' (Eisenbaum 2012:1).

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