

A Half-Century of Jewish Scholarship on Jesus

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From the time I was eight-years old until my Bar Mitzvah, I attended a Messianic Jewish congregation on Friday nights and a Conservative synagogue on Saturday mornings in the Washington, D.C. Metro area. On Sunday mornings, my father and I regularly had breakfast at the local bagel shop. Then we went to Abe's Jewish Book and Gift Store on Georgia Avenue which had a neon sign in the front window that said, "If it's Jewish we have it!"

I loved going to this Jewish bookstore because my father would buy me any book I wanted. I remember one day, when I was about twelve years old, I combed through the books and found one that looked particularly fascinating. I brought it to the register, placed it on the counter, and Mr. Eules, the owner, said to me, "David, you've chosen a very good book." What was that book? It was *The Genius of Paul* by Rabbi Samuel Sandmel. I read it as a teenager and it inspired me to learn more about Paul. As a young Messianic Jew, I was encouraged that mainstream Jewish scholars were interested in studying the New Testament and found meaning in Paul's writings.

Fast-forward 40 years and I am still reading these kinds of books. In fact, so many new works in this area are being published these days that it is hard to keep track. When I was invited by the Borough Park Symposium to introduce the whole topic of "Jewish New Testament Interpretation," and to do it in 30 minutes, I thought to myself, "*Oy vey!* Jewish interpretation of the *Brit Chadasha* has been going on now for almost two thousand years. How can I cover almost twenty centuries in half an hour?" Thus, out of necessity, I have had to limit the scope of this paper to Jewish New Testament interpretation within the past 50 years or so.¹

Moreover, I am going to limit the focus to mainstream Jewish scholarship and bracket off the many academic works that Messianic Jewish scholars have contributed over the last half-century. In addition, I am going to focus only on those who have

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Borough Park Symposium V, New York, 11 February 2020.

written notable monographs and other book-length studies.² The fact of the matter is that all Jewish scholars who specialize in Second Temple Judaism inevitably participate in New Testament interpretation since the New Testament is widely recognized as Second Temple Jewish literature. Finally, due to the limitations of time, I am only going to focus on Jewish scholarship on Jesus and leave Jewish scholarship on Paul for another day.³

Turning the dial back to the late 1960s, Rabbi Samuel Sandmel, who taught at Vanderbilt University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, published in 1967 his popular book *We Jews and Jesus*. The book is still in print and now includes a preface by his son, Rabbi David Sandmel.⁴ In *We Jews and Jesus*, Sandmel surveys modern Jewish research on Jesus and offers what he describes as a “reasoned and reasonable” approach to the historical Jesus from a Jewish perspective.⁵ He covers the works of Isaac Markus Jost, Joseph Salvador, Heinrich Graetz, Abraham Geiger, Claude Montefiore and Joseph Klausner. Notably, he does not address the writings of Samuel Hirsch,⁶ Emil Hirsch (the son of Samuel Hirsch),⁷ Kaufmann Kohler,⁸ Israel Abrahams (who worked closely with Montefiore),⁹ Martin Buber,¹⁰ Eduard Strauss,¹¹ Robert Eisler,¹² and Leo Baeck.¹³ In the end, Sandmel concludes that little if anything can be definitively

2 Among the works I have not focused on are *Jewish Expressions on Jesus: An Anthology*, ed. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin (New York: KTAV, 1977); Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Hoboken: KTAV/ADL, 1987); *Jews and Christians Speak of Jesus*, ed. Arthur E. Zannoni (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Ellis Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus? Messianism, Pharisaism, and the Development of Christianity* (Springfield: Behrman House, 1997); Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); *The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes*, ed. Leonard Greenspoon, Dennis Hamm and Bryan F. Le Beau (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 95–111; *Jesus through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation*, ed. Beatrice Bruteau (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001); Willis Barnstone, *The New Covenant Commonly Called the New Testament: The Four Gospels and Apocalypse* (New York: Riverhead, 2002); Philip Sigal, *The Halakha of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL, 2007); *The New Testament: A New Translation and Modern Explanation*, ed. and trans. Sidney Brichto (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 2009); *Jesus Among the Jews: Representation and Thought*, ed. Neta Stahl (London: Routledge, 2012); Herbert Basser with Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-based Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); *The Bible, the Talmud and the New Testament: Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik's Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Shaul Magid, trans. Jordan G. Levy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

3 For studies on Jewish interpretation of Paul, see Donald A. Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought,” in *Pauline Studies: Essays presented to Professor F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday*, ed. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 143–65; Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, “The ‘Essential Heresy’: Paul's View of the Law According to Jewish Writers, 1886–1986” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1990); Daniel R. Langton, “The Myth of the ‘Traditional View of Paul’ and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28:1 (2005): 69–104; Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, “Jewish Interpretation of Paul in the Last Thirty Years,” *Currents in Biblical Interpretation* 6:3 (2008): 355–76; Daniel R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Daniel R. Langton, “Jewish Readings of Paul,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, ed. Stephen Westerholm (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 455–71; Daniel R. Langton, “Paul in Jewish Thought,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 585–87; John G. Gager, *Who Made Early Christianity? The Jewish Lives of the Apostle Paul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

4 Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus: Exploring Theological Differences for Mutual Understanding* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2006).

5 Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 3–4.

6 Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden* (Leipzig: H. Hunger, 1843).

7 Emil Hirsch, *The Jews and Jesus* (Chicago: Bloch and Newman, 1893); Emil Hirsch, *The Doctrines of Jesus* (Chicago, 1894). Reprinted in *Defending the Faith: Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Writings on Christianity and Jesus*, ed. George L. Berlin (New York: SUNY, 1989), 129–41.

8 Kaufmann Kohler, *Jesus from Nazareth from a Jewish Point of View* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1899).

9 Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917, 1929).

10 Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951). See Tim J. Harding, “Jesus—A Life in Dialogue: A Christian Response to Martin Buber's Identification with the Jewish Jesus,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 16:2 (Fall 2016): 235–56.

11 Eduard Strauss, “Jesus von Nazareth,” *Der Jude* 6:11 (1921–1922): 686–91.

12 Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (London: Methuen & Company Limited, 1931).

13 Leo Baeck, *Das Evangelium als Urkunde der jüdischen Glaubensgeschichte* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1938).

known about the historical Jesus beyond the fact that he was a Jew.¹⁴

Also in the late 1960s, Schalom Ben-Chorin, a Reform Jew who was actively involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue, published his 1967 German work *Bruder Jesus*.¹⁵ It was translated into English in 2001 under the title *Brother Jesus: The Nazarene through Jewish Eyes*. The inspiration for the title came from Ben-Chorin's teacher, Martin Buber, who famously wrote in his book *Two Types of Faith*, “From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother.”¹⁶ Borrowing this imagery, Ben-Chorin pens in the preface of *Brother Jesus*:

Jesus is for me an eternal brother—not only my human brother but [also] my Jewish brother. I sense his brotherly hand clasping mine and asking me to follow him. It is *not* the hand of the Messiah, this hand marked by a wound; it is certainly *no divine hand*. It is rather a *human hand*, in whose lines the deepest sorrow is inscribed.¹⁷

Ben-Chorin concluded that Jesus was not a prophet or the Messiah but a Jew with a “revolutionary spirit.”¹⁸ Captivated by the Gospels, Ben-Chorin viewed Jesus as a first-century Torah teacher who focused on the “*internalization of the law*, whereby *love* constitutes the decisive and motivating factor.”¹⁹ Ben-Chorin described his approach to the New Testament as largely “intuitive” and arising “out of a lifelong familiarity with the text.”²⁰

In 1968, David Flusser, Professor of Early Christianity and Judaism of the Second Temple Period at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, published in German and English the first edition of his book *Jesus*.²¹ This was followed thirty years later by a revised and augmented second edition with R. Steven Notley. The fourth edition appeared in 2007 under the title *The Sage from Galilee*.²² Flusser, an Orthodox Jew, sought to understand the Jesus of history on the basis of philological and archaeological evidence, and concluded that the synoptic gospels largely preserved the memory of Jesus' life and teachings, Luke most notably. Moreover, they portray Jesus as fully within Judaism. As Flusser put it, Jesus was “a faithful, law-observant Jew”²³ who, while non-sectarian, “was closest to the school of Hillel who preached love, and he led the way further to unconditional love—even of one's enemies and of sinners.”²⁴

In the 1970s and 80s, Pinchas Lapide, an Orthodox Jew and visiting professor of New

14 Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 108. Cf. Samuel Sandmel, *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (3rd ed.; Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2005), 193–211. Originally published by The Alumni Association of the Hebrew Union College, 1956.

15 Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus: Der Nazarener in jüdischer Sicht* (Munich: List Verlag, 1967).

16 Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus: The Nazarene through Jewish Eyes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), xiii. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, 12.

17 Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 5.

18 See Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 46, 73, 117. Cf. Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis & Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 33.

19 Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 10.

20 Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 5.

21 David Flusser, *Jesus in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968).

22 David Flusser with R. Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

23 David Flusser with R. Steven Notley, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 58.

24 Flusser with Notley, *Jesus* (2001), 92.

Testament at Göttingen University, wrote two important works on Jesus in German that have yet to be translated into English. They are *The Rabbi of Nazareth: Transformations of the Jewish Image of Jesus* (1974)²⁵ and *The Jew Jesus: Theses of a Jew; Answers from a Christian* (1980).²⁶ He also co-authored a number of books with well-known Christian theologians about the historical Jesus. These works included *Brother or Lord? A Jew and a Christian Talk Together About Jesus* by Hans Küng and Pinchas Lapide (1977),²⁷ *Jesus in Two Perspectives: A Jewish-Christian Dialog* between Pinchas Lapide and Ulrich Luz (1985),²⁸ and *Encountering Jesus—Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue* between Karl Rahner and Pinchas Lapide (1987).²⁹ One of Lapide's most intriguing books was *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (1982).³⁰ In this work he argues in support of the New Testament account that Jesus rose from the dead. This notwithstanding, Jesus' resurrection from the dead did not ipso facto mean that he was the Messiah of Israel. For Lapide, Jesus was "the Savior of the Gentiles" (not the Jews) and he only prepared the way for the Messiah.³¹ Lapide concludes:

Any Jewish scholar who examines the New Testament will find that Jesus was undoubtedly a Jew—not just a marginal Jew, nor a lukewarm, *pro forma* Jew, but a true Jew, whose spiritual roots rose out of the prophetic core of Israel's faith, that he was closely related to the Pharisees, that he was a Galilean, and that, on top of everything else, he was a master in the art of telling parables.³²

Lapide's motto in reading the Gospels with Christians was, "Let us two study *with one another* and discover the earthly Jesus from below."³³

From the 1970s until his death in 2013, Geza Vermes, Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford, devoted himself to the study of the historical Jesus. Vermes wrote a trilogy of books on the Jewishness of Jesus. In 1973, he published *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*.³⁴ Ten years later, in 1983, he wrote *Jesus and the World of Judaism*³⁵ (later retitled *Jesus in His Jewish Context*).³⁶ A decade after that, in 1993, he released *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*.³⁷ Vermes also wrote a trilogy of books on the life of Jesus: *The Nativity: History & Legend* (2006),³⁸ *The Passion: The True*

25 Pinchas Lapide, *Der Rabbi von Nazaret: Wandlungen des jüdischen Jesusbildes* (Trier: Spee-Verlag, 1974).

26 Pinchas Lapide, *Der Jude Jesus: Thesen eines Juden; Antworten eines Christen* (Zürich: Benzinger, 1980).

27 Hans Küng and Pinchas Lapide, *Brother or Lord? A Jew and a Christian Talk Together about Jesus*, trans. E. Quinn (Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1977).

28 Pinchas Lapide and Ulrich Luz, *Jesus in Two Perspectives: A Jewish-Christian Dialog*, trans. Lawrence Deneff (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

29 Karl Rahner and Pinchas Lapide, *Encountering Jesus—Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue*, trans. David Perkins (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

30 Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982). See David Mishkin, *Jewish Scholarship on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017), 158–64.

31 Rahner and Lapide, *Encountering Jesus—Encountering Judaism*, 117–18.

32 Rahner and Lapide, *Encountering Jesus—Encountering Judaism*, 114.

33 Küng and Lapide, *Brother or Lord?*, 44.

34 Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1973).

35 Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM, 1983).

36 Geza Vermes, *Jesus in His Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

37 Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

38 Geza Vermes, *The Nativity: History & Legend* (London: Penguin, 2006).

Story of an Event that Changed Human History (2005),³⁹ and *The Resurrection: History & Myth* (2008).⁴⁰ In addition to these two trilogies, he wrote *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (2000),⁴¹ *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (2003),⁴² and *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea, AD 30-325* (2012).⁴³ Vermes' work is discussed in depth in Hilde Moller's recent study, *The Vermes Quest: The Significance of Geza Vermes for Jesus Research* (2017).⁴⁴

Vermes' interest in the historical Jesus was personal. He converted to Catholicism with his parents when he was six-years old and became a Catholic priest after World War II. Since he was not permitted to enter the Dominican and Jesuit orders due to his Jewish background, he entered the Order of the Fathers of Notre-Dame de Sion. Notably, this order was established by two Jewish Catholic priests, the Ratisbonne brothers. In the 1960s, Vermes became actively involved in addressing anti-Semitism within the Catholic Church and made a significant contribution to Vatican II. In 1970, three years before he wrote *Jesus the Jew*, Vermes renounced his belief in Jesus and returned to a mainstream Jewish identity, joining the Liberal Jewish Synagogue of London. Vermes viewed Jesus as a Galilean Hasid who led a renewal movement within Second Temple Judaism. As Vermes put it, "the person of Jesus is to be seen as part of first-century charismatic Judaism and as the paramount example of the early Hasidim or Devout."⁴⁵

In 2008, Rabbi Michael Cook, Emeritus Professor of Intertestamental and Early Christian Literatures at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, published *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment*.⁴⁶ Cook addresses in this work what he regards to be widespread "intentional ignorance" of the New Testament in the Jewish world.⁴⁷ The book is one of a number of publications in which Cook highlights the tendentious nature of much that is written by Jews about Jesus' life and teachings.⁴⁸ Cook's research on the New Testament goes back to the late 1970s when he published his monograph *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (1978).⁴⁹

In 1988, Amy-Jill Levine, currently University Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt, published her doctoral dissertation, *The Social and Ethnic*

39 Geza Vermes, *The Passion: The True Story of an Event that Changed Human History* (London: Penguin, 2005).

40 Geza Vermes, *The Resurrection: History & Myth* (London: Penguin, 2008).

41 Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2000).

42 Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2003).

43 Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea, AD 30-325* (London: Penguin, 2012).

44 Hilde B. Moller, *The Vermes Quest: The Significance of Geza Vermes for Jesus Research* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

45 Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 79.

46 Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2008).

47 Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament*, 1.

48 See Michael J. Cook, "Jewish Reflections on Jesus: Some Abiding Trends," in *The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes*, 95–111; Michael J. Cook, "Where Jewish Scholars on Jesus Go Awry: Last Supper, Sanhedrin, Blasphemy, Barabbas," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 28:3 (Spring 2010): 70–77; Michael J. Cook, "How Credible Is Jewish Scholarship on Jesus?" in *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation*, ed. Zev Garber (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), 251–70.

49 Michael J. Cook, *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

Dimensions of Matthean Social History.⁵⁰ In 2006, she wrote her widely acclaimed book *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*,⁵¹ and that same year co-edited with Dale Allison and John Dominic Crossan *The Historical Jesus in Context*.⁵² Five years later, Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler co-edited the first edition of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (2011).⁵³ A fully revised and expanded second edition of the JANT appeared in 2017,⁵⁴ notably with a section on “Messianic Judaism” by Yaakov Ariel among other historical-critical essays related to Jesus and New Testament interpretation.⁵⁵

In 2014, Levine published a book on Jesus’ parables entitled *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*,⁵⁶ and in 2018 she wrote an exegetical and theological commentary with Ben Witherington III entitled *The Gospel of Luke* for the New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series.⁵⁷ The commentary is a wonderful example of how Jesus research can be advanced through Jewish-Christian dialogue—in this case between a Methodist evangelical New Testament scholar and a Jewish feminist New Testament scholar who attends an Orthodox synagogue, as Levine describes herself. Levine models a similar collaboration with Warren Carter in their 2013 book *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*,⁵⁸ which has four chapters devoted to the Gospels.

Of all the Jewish New Testament scholars mentioned in this study, Levine is the only one who, through her writings, has attempted to resource Gentile Christians in their observance of the Church’s holy days. In 2018, Levine published *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Week*,⁵⁹ a study of the biblical texts related to the week of Jesus’ death. Its sequel appeared in 2019 – *Light of the World: A Beginner’s Guide to Advent*,⁶⁰ a study of the biblical texts related to Jesus’ birth.

In 2022, Levine is scheduled to publish *Jesus for Everyone, Not Just Christians*.⁶¹ Levine is one of the most prolific Jewish New Testament scholars today who specializes in Jesus research. She maintains that Jesus’ life and teachings need to be understood *within* the context of Second Temple Judaism. At the same time, Levine regards the Gospels as texts that “plant seeds that, with certain types of fertilizer, yield an anti-Jewish growth.”⁶²

50 Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

51 Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2006).

52 *The Historical Jesus in Context*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison and John Dominic Crossan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

53 *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

54 *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Second Edition, Fully Revised and Expanded, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

55 Yaakov Ariel, “Messianic Judaism,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (2017), 756–59.

56 Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

57 Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

58 Warren Carter and Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013).

59 Amy-Jill Levine, *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Week* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018).

60 Amy-Jill Levine, *Light of the World: A Beginner’s Guide to Advent* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2019).

61 Amy-Jill Levine, *Jesus for Everyone, Not Just Christians* (New York: HarperOne, forthcoming).

62 Amy-Jill Levine, “Matthew, Mark, and Luke: Good News or Bad?” in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 97.

In 1988, Paula Fredriksen, Aurelio Professor of Scripture emerita at Boston University and Distinguished Visiting Professor of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, published *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ*.⁶³ This was followed in 1999 with *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*.⁶⁴ In 2002, Fredriksen co-edited with Adele Reinhartz the important work *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*.⁶⁵ Her most recent book on the Jewish context of the Gospels is her 2018 publication *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation*.⁶⁶ Fredriksen’s historical reconstruction of Jesus’ life and teachings locates him fully within first-century Judaism and she regards all of the New Testament writers as being Jewish. From her perspective, Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah. Rather, the Messianic attribution that led to his death was essentially a misunderstanding on the part of his disciples and others. Fredriksen was raised Catholic and converted to Orthodox Judaism.

In 1992, Adele Reinhartz, Professor in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at Ottawa University, published her monograph *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*.⁶⁷ A decade later, in 2001, she released her book *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*.⁶⁸ The following year Reinhartz co-edited with Paula Fredriksen *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism*. In 2007, she turned her focus to how Jesus is portrayed in the entertainment industry and published *Jesus of Hollywood*.⁶⁹ Returning to the focus on Jews and Judaism in John, Reinhartz wrote in 2018 *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John*.⁷⁰ The crux of the matter for Reinhartz is this:

The Gospel of John presents its readers, listeners, and interpreters with a serious problem: how can we reconcile the Gospel’s exalted spirituality and deep knowledge of Judaism with its portrayal of the Jews as the children of the devil (John 8:44) who persecuted Christ and his followers?⁷¹

For Reinhartz, the fourth gospel is profoundly anti-Jewish and supersessionist in content. In 2018, Reinhartz published an edited volume entitled *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations*.⁷² In these works on John, Reinhartz primarily focuses on literary criticism and anti-Jewish tendencies in the story rather than questions related

63 Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). A second edition was published in 2000.

64 Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

65 *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

66 Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

67 Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992).

68 Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

69 Adele Reinhartz, *Jesus of Hollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

70 Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018).

71 Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, back cover.

72 *The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Adele Reinhartz (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2018).

to the historical Jesus.

In 2012, Daniel Boyarin, Professor of Talmudic Culture at the University of California at Berkeley, released his book *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*.⁷³ It is a small study but it powerfully argues that the Gospels depiction of Jesus as a divine Messiah who suffers and dies for the sins of Israel was not a departure from Jewish thought but a reflection of its normativeness during the Second Temple period. As Boyarin puts it:

The reasons that many Jews came to believe that Jesus was divine was because they were already expecting that the Messiah/Christ would be a god-man. This expectation was part and parcel of Jewish tradition.⁷⁴

Boyarin's thesis has been widely embraced by Jewish scholars who work in the field of New Testament and Second Temple Judaism.⁷⁵

In 2011, Zev Garber, Emeritus Professor and Chair of Jewish Studies and Philosophy at Los Angeles Valley College and an Orthodox Jew, published an edited volume entitled *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation*.⁷⁶ Its essays reflect Garber's view that "the incarnate Christ of Christian belief lived and died a faithful Jew. . . . [T]he modern Jew can identify with the faith and fate of Jesus but not faith in Jesus."⁷⁷

In 2020, Garber and Kenneth Hanson, Director of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of Central Florida, published *Judaism and Jesus*. One element that makes this book exceptional is its commitment to include Messianic Jewish scholars in the conversation. Garber and Hanson comment in the preface:

Both of us have come together in order to probe the multiple issues, both theological and historical, relating to Jesus/Yeshua, and also to challenge the artificial separation between Jewish, Christian, and Messianic Jewish scholarship. . . . The stereotypes developed by practitioners of both faiths over the past two millennia need to be challenged, and no one should be excluded from the interchange of ideas. That includes Messianic Jews, who are generally looked upon with a good deal of suspicion by the greater Jewish community.⁷⁸

This book represents a new and welcome development in mainstream Jewish Jesus studies.

As a final note on recent Jewish Jesus research, Rabbi Walter Homolka, Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at the University of Potsdam, has written two works that detail the history of Jewish Jesus scholarship: *Jesus Reclaimed: Jewish Perspectives on the Nazarene* (2015)⁷⁹ and *Jewish Jesus Research and its Challenge to Christology*

73 Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

74 Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 56.

75 Building on Boyarin's work, Isaac Oliver, Associate Professor at Bradley University and a Reform Jew, argues for a fully Torah-observant Jesus in the synoptic gospels. See Isaac W. Oliver, *Torah Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

76 *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation*, ed. Zev Garber (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011).

77 Garber, *The Jewish Jesus*, 1, 8.

78 Zev Garber and Kenneth L. Hanson, *Judaism and Jesus* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2020), 4.

79 Walter Homolka, *Jesus Reclaimed: Jewish Perspectives on the Nazarene*, trans. Ingrid Shafer (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

Today (2017).⁸⁰ I also recommend Matthew Hoffman's *From Rebel to Rabbi* (2007), which devotes the first chapter to the "Quest for the Jewish Jesus,"⁸¹ and Daniel Moore's *Jesus, an Emerging Jewish Mosaic: Jewish Perspectives, Post-Holocaust* (2008).⁸² These volumes serve to map Jewish Jesus studies in the modern period.

In conclusion, Jewish New Testament interpretation is an exciting area that has broken new ground over the past 50 years. Mainstream Jewish scholars and Messianic Jewish scholars are beginning to learn from each other about the Jewish Jesus, even as both groups contributed to this year's Borough Park Symposium, Amy-Jill Levine included! This is something that was unthinkable fifty years ago. I am grateful that my daughter, Elisa, a third-generation Messianic Jew, could be here to see this and participate. May Elisa's generation build on this progress until the Jewish world in toto reclaims Jesus as one of our own. At the same time, may we never forget Yeshua's final words in the New Testament that bear witness to his unique identity within Israel, "I, Yeshua, have sent My angel to testify these things to you for My communities. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. . . . Yes! I am coming soon!" (Rev 22:16, 20 TLV).

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80 Walter Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research and its Challenge to Christology Today* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). See Bruce Chilton, "Implications and Prospects of Jewish Jesus Research: A Review Essay," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 16 (2018): 62–79.

81 Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 13–60.

82 Daniel F. Moore, *Jesus, an Emerging Jewish Mosaic: Jewish Perspectives, Post-Holocaust* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

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