

Criticized by the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes for not living "according to the traditions of the elders" because he and his disciples eat without washing their hands, Jesus, instead of defending his action, attacks his critics as "hypocrites" and charges that they value their own traditions while breaking God's commandments. Then he publicly calls into question the kosher laws themselves—again explaining his meaning to his disciples alone:

And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand; there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." And when he had entered the house, and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Are you, too, without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and so passes out of him? What comes out of a man is what defiles him; for from within, from the human heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, . . . envy, pride, foolishness. . . . All these evils come from within" (7:14–23).

Here Mark wants to show that although Jesus discards traditional kosher ("purity") laws, he advocates instead purging the "heart"—that is, impulses, desires, and imagination.

Now that Jesus has alienated not only the scribes, Pharisees, and Herodians, but also his relatives and many of his own townspeople, he travels with his small band of disciples, preaching to the crowds. Anticipating what lies ahead of him in Jerusalem, where he will challenge the priestly party on its own ground, Jesus nevertheless resolutely leads his followers there, walking ahead of them, while "they were astonished, and those who followed were terrified" (10:32). On the way he tells the twelve exactly whom they are to blame for his impending death:

"The chief priests and scribes . . . will condemn [the Son of man] to death, and hand him over to the nations, and they

will mock him and spit upon him, and scourge him and kill him" (10:33).

Opposition to Jesus intensifies after he enters Jerusalem. Having prepared a formal procession to go into the city, Jesus is openly acclaimed, in defiance of the Romans, as the man who comes to restore Israel's ancient empire: "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!" Then, with his followers, he enters the great Temple and makes a shocking public demonstration there:

He entered the Temple, and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the Temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple (11:15–16).

Now Jesus invokes the words of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, as if to speak for the Lord himself against those who permit financial transactions in the Temple courtyard:

And he taught, and said to them, "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." But the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought a way to destroy him, for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching (11:17–18).

When the chief priests and scribes, joined by members of the Jewish council, demand to know by what authority he acts, Jesus refuses to answer. Instead he retells Isaiah's parable of God's wrath against Israel (12:1–12) in a way so transparent that even the chief priests, scribes, and elders recognize that he is telling it "against them" (12:12). The following scenes show Jesus contending first against the Pharisees and Herodians, who fail to trick him into making anti-Roman statements (12:13–15), and then against the scribes (12:35). Finally he warns a great crowd:

Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes, and to have salutations in the marketplaces, and the best seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation (12:38-40).

Then, as Jesus comes out of the Temple, Mark says, he responds to his disciples' awestruck admiration for the sacred precincts by predicting the Temple's destruction: "There will not be left one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (13:2). When Peter, James, John, and Andrew privately ask what he means, Jesus sits with them on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple and explains. He predicts a series of horrifying catastrophes (these are events in which Mark's contemporaries would recognize their own times, especially the events of the war between 66 and 70): "wars and rumors of war," famine, public enthusiasm for false messiahs. Jesus warns in veiled language that when they see "the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be"—the pagan desecration of the Temple—they should flee into the mountains (13:7-14).

Mark intends Jesus' followers, living in terrible times, to take comfort in knowing that their leader had foreseen how they would suffer, out of their loyalty to him ("for my sake"), ostracism and reprisals, hatred and betrayal, even—perhaps especially—from their family members:

"Take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and rulers for my sake . . . and brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have their parents put to death; and you will be hated by all for the sake of my name (13:9-13).

What is the believer to do, facing betrayal, isolation, and mortal danger? Mark says that Jesus enjoined his followers to "endure to the end." Now Mark has to tell how Jesus himself

"endured to the end," through arrest, trials in both Jewish and Roman courts, torture, and execution, thus giving his endangered followers an example of how to endure. Two days before Passover, Mark says, "the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the festival, lest there be a tumult among the people,' " since so far the people remained on Jesus' side. Shortly afterward, Judas Iscariot, obviously aware of the hostility his master had aroused among influential people, "went to the chief priests in order to betray [Jesus] to them, and when they heard it they were glad, and offered him money" (14:1-11).

At night, Mark says, Judas led "a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and the scribes and Temple officers" to Gethsemane, a garden on the Mount of Olives, to capture Jesus. One of his men fought back with a sword, injuring the high priest's slave, and Jesus protested at being treated "like a robber" (the term that Josephus and others commonly use to characterize an "insurrectionist"). But the rest of his followers abandoned him and fled; Jesus was taken. The armed men "brought him to the high priest," apparently to his residence. Although the Sanhedrin traditionally was not allowed to meet at night, Mark tells us that on the night of Jesus' arrest, "all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled" at the high priest's residence to try his case in a formal proceeding.

Now Mark presents the first of two trial scenes—the "trial before the Sanhedrin," which he follows with the "trial before Pilate." Most scholars assume that even if these events occurred, Jesus' followers could not have witnessed what went on at either his appearance before the Jewish council or his arraignment by the Romans.²⁸ But Mark is not concerned with reporting history. By introducing these scenes, Mark wants to show above all that the well-known charge against Jesus—sedition—not only was false but was invented by Jesus' *Jewish* enemies; further, Mark says, the Roman governor himself realized this and tried in vain to save Jesus! According to Mark, the Sanhedrin had already prejudged the case. The trial was only a pretense in order "to put him to death" (14:55). After hearing a series of trumped-up

charges and lying witnesses, some accusing Jesus of having threatened to destroy the Temple, the chief priest interrogates Jesus, demanding that he answer the charges against him. Jesus, however, remains silent. Finally the chief priest asks, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" (14:61). Here, for the first time in Mark's gospel, Jesus publicly admits his divine identity to people other than his disciples, and goes on to warn his accusers that they will soon witness his vindication: "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62). Then, Mark continues, the high priest, tearing his robe, says, "You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death" (14:64).

Many scholars have commented on the historical implausibility of this account.²⁹ Did the Sanhedrin conduct a trial that violated its own legal practices concerning examining witnesses, self-incrimination, courtroom procedure, and sentencing? Although we know little about Sanhedrin procedures during Jesus' time,³⁰ did this council actually assemble at night, contrary to what seems to have been its precedent? If so, why does Mark go on to add a *second* version of the council meeting to discuss this case—a meeting that takes place the following morning, as if nothing had happened the night before? For after Mark ends his first, more elaborate account, he lets slip what now becomes a redundancy: that "as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council, held a consultation, and they bound Jesus, and led him away, and delivered him to Pilate" (15:1).

We cannot, of course, know what actually happened, but Mark's second version, which agrees with Luke's, sounds more likely—that the council convened in the morning, and decided that the prisoner should be kept in custody and turned over to Pilate to face charges.³¹ The gospel of John, relying upon a source independent of Mark's, offers another reconstructed account that gives a plausible interpretation of these events.³² According to John, the chief priests, alarmed by the crowds Jesus attracted, feared that his presence in Jerusalem during Passover

might ignite public demonstrations, "and the Romans will come and destroy our holy place and our nation" (11:48). The civil strife that preceded the Jewish war, as John and his contemporaries well knew, had verified the accuracy of such concerns about possible Roman reprisals.

Many New Testament scholars who have analyzed the account of Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin agree that Mark (or his predecessors) probably wrote the first version to emphasize his primary point: that Pilate merely ratified a previous Jewish verdict, and carried out a death sentence that he himself neither ordered nor approved—but a sentence unanimously pronounced by the entire leadership of the Jewish people.³³

This does not mean, however, that Mark is motivated by malice toward the Jewish leaders. Indeed, Mark stops far short of the extent to which Matthew, Luke, and John will go to blame the Jewish leaders for the crucifixion, although the tendency to blame them had already begun before Mark's time and had its effect on his narrative. Nevertheless, Mark and his fellow believers, as followers of a convicted criminal, knew that such allegiance would arouse suspicion and invite reprisals. Roman magistrates had already arrested and executed several prominent members of the movement, including Peter and Paul. It is no wonder, then, that, as one historian says, Mark wanted

to emphasize the culpability of the Jewish nation for the death of Jesus, particularly of its leaders. . . . [Mark's] tendency was defensive rather than aggressive. He was concerned to avoid mentioning anything that would provoke Roman antagonism towards, or even suspicion of, the ideals for which he stood. . . . The evangelist therefore contrived to conceal that Jesus had been condemned and executed on a charge of sedition.³⁴

Mark's account also involves an important positive motive. Mark intends the "trial before the Sanhedrin" to mirror the precarious situation in which he and his fellow believers now stand in relation to leaders of the Jewish communities during and after

the war.³⁵ In this account of Jesus' courage before his judges, Mark offers Jesus' followers a model of how to act when they too are put on trial.

Mark weaves into this account a contrapuntal story—the story of Jesus' chief disciple, Peter, who, in terror, denies Jesus, an example of how *not* to act when on trial. For whereas Jesus stands up to the Sanhedrin and confesses his divine mission, boldly risking—and accepting—the death sentence, Peter claims not to have known Jesus. Having surreptitiously followed Jesus to the scene of the trial, Mark says, Peter stood warming his hands by the fire when one of the household servants said to him, “You, too, were with the Nazarene, Jesus” (14:67). But Peter denies this (“I do not know what you mean; . . . I do not know the man”) three times, with increasing vehemence, cursing and swearing, and finally escapes. After recognizing what he has done, Peter “broke down and wept” (14:72).

Mark knows that those who publicly confess their conviction that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of God” (14:61) may put themselves in danger of abuse, ridicule, even threats to their lives. The terms *Messiah* and *Son of God* would probably have been anachronistic during the time of Jesus; but many of Mark's contemporaries must have recognized them as the way Christians of their own time confessed their faith. In this dramatic scene, then, Mark again confronts his audience with the question that pervades his entire narrative: Who recognizes the spirit in Jesus as divine, and who does not? Who stands on God's side, and who on Satan's? By contrasting Jesus' courageous confession with Peter's denial, Mark draws a dramatic picture of the choice confronting Jesus' followers: they must take sides in a war that allows no neutral ground.

Having tried to show that the whole affair concerning Jesus was essentially an internal Jewish conflict that got out of hand, Mark now offers his version of Jesus' “trial before Pilate.” Many scholars think that all Mark actually knew was that Jesus had been crucified as a would-be king of the Jews during Pilate's administration as governor of Judea. While he takes account of this indisputable fact, Mark intends to minimize its significance.

Consider, then, how Mark tells the story. Pilate, apprised that the prisoner was accused of political insurgency, attempts to interrogate him. “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they make against you” (15:4). Mark says that when Jesus refused to answer his questions, Pilate, instead of demonstrating anger or even impatience, “was amazed” (15:5). Mark goes further. Claiming to know the governor's private assessment of the case, Mark says that Pilate “recognized that it was out of envy that they had handed him over” (15:10). But instead of making a decision and giving orders, Pilate takes no action. Then, hearing shouts from the crowd outside, he goes out to address them, asking what they want: “Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?” But the crowd demands instead the release of Barabbas, whom Mark describes as one of the imprisoned insurrectionists, who “had committed murder in the rebellion” (15:7). Pilate seems uncertain, wanting to refuse but afraid to go against the crowd's demand. As if helpless, he again asks the crowd what to do: “What shall I do with the man whom you call the king of the Jews?” (15:12). When the crowd shouts for Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate in effect pleads with his subjects for justice: “Why, what evil has he done?” (15:14). But the shouting continues, and Pilate, “wishing to satisfy the crowd” (15:15), releases Barabbas and, having ordered Jesus to be flogged, acquiesces to their demand that he be crucified. But according to Mark, Pilate never pronounces sentence, and never actually orders the execution. As Mark tells the story, even inside Pilate's own chamber, the chief priests are in charge: it is they who make accusations and it is they who stir up the crowds, whose vehemence forces Jesus' execution upon a reluctant Pilate.

The Pilate who appears in the gospels, as we have noted, has little to do with the historical Pilate—that is, with the man we know from other first-century historical and political sources, both Jewish and Roman, as a brutal governor. As Raymond Brown notes in his meticulous study of the passion narratives, except in Christian tradition, portraits of Pilate range from bitterly hostile to negative.³⁶ Philo, an educated, influential member of the Jewish community in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, was

Pilate's contemporary. In one of his writings, his *Embassy to Gaius*, he describes his experiences as a member of an official delegation sent to Rome to represent the interests of the Alexandrian Jewish community to the Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula. In the course of his narrative, Philo, referring to the situation of the Jewish community in Judea, describes governor Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn, and cruel disposition," and lists as typical features of his administration "greed, violence, robbery, assault, abusive behavior, frequent executions without trial, and endless savage ferocity."³⁷ Philo writes to persuade Roman rulers to uphold the privileges of Jewish communities, as he claims that the emperor Tiberius had done. In this letter, Philo sees Pilate as the image of all that can go wrong with Roman administration of Jewish provinces.

Philo's testimony is partly corroborated in Josephus's history of the same era. As we have seen, Josephus, like Philo, was a man of considerable political experience; as former Jewish governor of Galilee under the Romans, he writes his history under Roman patronage in a tone sympathetic to Roman interests. Yet Josephus records several episodes that show Pilate's contempt for Jewish religious sensibilities. Pilate's predecessors, for example, recognizing that Jews considered images of the emperor to be idolatrous, had instituted the practice of choosing for the Roman garrison in Jerusalem a military unit whose standards did not carry such images. But when Pilate was appointed governor he deliberately violated this precedent. First he ordered the existing garrison to leave; then he led to Jerusalem a replacement unit whose standards displayed imperial images, timing his arrival to coincide with the Jewish high holy days, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Pilate apparently knew that he was committing sacrilege in the eyes of his subjects, for he took care to arrive in Jerusalem at night, having ordered the standards to be covered with cloth during the journey.

When the people of Jerusalem heard that Pilate and his troops had introduced images they regarded as idolatrous into the holy city, they gathered in the streets to protest. A great crowd followed Pilate back to Caesarea and stood outside his residence,

pleading with him to remove them. Since the standards always accompanied the military unit, this amounted to a demand that Pilate withdraw the garrison. When Pilate refused, the crowds continued to demonstrate. After five days, Pilate, exasperated but adamant, decided to force an end to the demonstrations. Pretending to offer the demonstrators a formal hearing, he summoned them to appear before him in the stadium. There Pilate had amassed soldiers, ordered them to surround the crowd, and threatened to massacre the demonstrators unless they gave in. To Pilate's surprise, the Jews declared that they would rather die than see their law violated. At this point Pilate capitulated and withdrew the unit. As Mary Smallwood comments:

The Jews had won a decisive victory in the first round against their new governor, but now they knew what sort of man they were up against, and thereafter anything he did was liable to be suspect. . . . But more was to follow.³⁸

Roman authorities also respected Jewish sensitivity by banning images considered idolatrous from coins minted in Judea. Only during Pilate's administration was this practice violated: coins depicting pagan cult symbols have been found dated 29–31 C.E. Did Pilate order the change, as the German scholar E. Stauffer believes, "to force [his] subjects to handle representations of pagan culture"?³⁹ Raymond Brown suggests that Pilate simply "underestimated Jewish sensitivity" on such matters.⁴⁰

Pilate next decided to build an aqueduct in Jerusalem. But to finance the project, he appropriated money from the Temple treasury, an act of sacrilege even from the Roman point of view, since the Temple funds were, by law, regarded as sacrosanct.⁴¹ This direct assault upon the Temple and its treasury aroused vehement opposition. When Pilate next visited Jerusalem, he was met with larger demonstrations than ever; now the angry crowds became abusive and threatening. Anticipating trouble, Pilate had ordered soldiers to dress in plain clothes, conceal their weapons, and mingle with the people. When the crowd refused to disperse, he signaled to the soldiers to break it up with force. Several peo-

ple were killed, and others were trampled to death in the stam-pede that followed.⁴² Even the gospel of Luke, which gives an astonishingly benign portrait of Pilate in the trial narrative, elsewhere mentions how people told Jesus about certain Galileans "whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices" (13:1).

Late in Pilate's tenure as governor other provocative incidents prompted Jewish leaders to protest to the emperor Tiberius against Pilate's attacks on their religion. In 31 C.E. Pilate angered his subjects by dedicating golden shields in the Herodian palace in Jerusalem. We cannot be certain what occasioned the protest; the scholar B. C. McGinny suggests that the shields were dedicated to the "divine" emperor, a description that would have incensed many Jews.⁴³ Again Pilate faced popular protest: a crowd assembled, led by four Herodian princes. When Pilate refused to remove the shields, perhaps claiming he was acting only out of respect for the emperor, Josephus says, they replied, "Do not take [the emperor] Tiberius as your pretext for outraging the nation; he does not wish any of our customs to be overthrown."⁴⁴ When Pilate proved adamant, the Jewish princes appealed to the emperor, who rebuked Pilate and ordered him to remove the shields from Jerusalem. One recent commentator remarks that

the bullying of Pilate by his Jewish adversaries in the case of the shields resembles strongly the bullying of Pilate in [the gospel of] John's account of the passion, including the threat of appeal to the emperor.⁴⁵

Yet characterizing these protests as "bullying" seems strange; what recourse did a subject people have to challenge the governor's decision, except to appeal over his head to a higher authority? Five years later, when a Samaritan leader assembled a large multitude, some of them armed, to gather and wait for a sign from God, Pilate immediately sent troops to monitor the situation. The troops blockaded the crowd, killing some and capturing others, while the rest fled. Pilate ordered the ringleaders executed.⁴⁶

Pilate's rule ended abruptly when the legate of Syria finally responded to repeated protests by stripping Pilate of his commission and dispatching a man from his own staff to serve as governor in his place. Pilate was ordered to return to Rome at once to answer charges against him, and disappeared from the historical record. Philo's account coincides with Mark's on one point: that Pilate, aware of the animosity toward him, was concerned lest the chief priests complain about him to the emperor. Yet Mark, as we have seen, presents a Pilate not only as a man too weak to withstand the shouting of a crowd, but also as one solicitous to ensure justice in the case of a Jewish prisoner whom the Jewish leaders want to destroy.

Mark's benign portrait of Pilate increases the culpability of the Jewish leaders and supports Mark's contention that Jews, not Romans, were the primary force behind Jesus' crucifixion. Throughout the following decades, as bitterness between the Jewish majority and Jesus' followers increased, the gospels came to depict Pilate in an increasingly favorable light. As Paul Winter observes,

the stern Pilate grows more mellow from gospel to gospel [from Mark to Matthew, from Matthew and Luke to John]. . . . The more removed from history, the more sympathetic a character he becomes.⁴⁷

In depicting Jesus' Jewish enemies, the same process works in reverse. Matthew, writing around ten years later, depicts much greater antagonism between Jesus and the Pharisees than Mark suggests. And while Mark says that the leaders restrained their animosity because the crowds favored Jesus, Matthew's account ends with both leaders *and* crowds unanimously shouting for his execution. Furthermore, what Mark merely implies—that Jesus' opponents are energized by Satan—Luke and John will state explicitly. Both Matthew and Luke, writing ten to twenty years after Mark, adapted the earlier gospel and revised it in various ways, updating it to reflect the situation of Jesus' followers in their own times.

Jesus' followers did not invent the practice of demonizing enemies within their own group. In this respect, as in many others, as we shall see, they drew upon traditions they shared with other first-century Jewish sects. The Essenes, for example, had developed and elaborated images of an evil power they called by many names—Satan, Belial, Beelzebub, Mastema ("hatred")—precisely to characterize their own struggle against a Jewish majority whom they, for reasons different from those of Jesus' followers, denounced as apostate. The Essenes never admitted Gentiles to their movement. But the followers of Jesus did—cautiously and provisionally at first, and against the wishes of some members. But as the Christian movement became increasingly Gentile during the second century and later, the identification of Satan primarily with the Jewish enemies of Jesus, borne along in Christian tradition over the centuries, would fuel the fires of anti-Semitism.

The relationship between Jesus' followers and the rest of the Jewish community, however, especially during the first century, is anything but simple. Mark himself, like the Essenes, sees his movement essentially as a conflict within one "house"—as I read it, the house of Israel. Such religious reformers see their primary struggle not with foreigners, however ominously Roman power lurks in the background, but with other Jews who try to define the "people of God."⁴⁸ Yet while Mark sees the Jewish leaders as doing Satan's work in trying to destroy Jesus, his own account is by no means anti-Jewish, much less anti-Semitic. After all, virtually everyone who appears in the account is Jewish, including, of course, the Messiah. Mark does not see himself as separate from Israel, but depicts Jesus' followers as what Isaiah calls God's "remnant" *within Israel* (Isaiah 10:22–23). Even the images that Mark invokes to characterize the majority—images of Satan, Beelzebub, and the devil—paradoxically express the *intimacy* of Mark's relationship with the Jewish community as a whole, for, as we shall see, the figure of Satan, as it emerged over the centuries in Jewish tradition, is not a hostile power assailing Israel from without, but the source and representation of conflict *within* the community.

II

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF SATAN: FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE TO THE GOSPELS

The conflict between Jesus' followers and their fellow Jews is not, of course, the first sectarian movement that divided the Jewish world, a world whose early history we know primarily from the Hebrew Bible, a collection of authoritative law, prophets, psalms, and other writings assembled centuries before the four gospels and other Christian writings were brought together in the New Testament. Who assembled this collection we do not know, but we may infer from its contents that it was compiled to constitute the religious history of the Jewish people, and so to create the basis for a unified society.¹

Excluded from the Hebrew Bible were writings of Jewish sectarians, apparently because such authors tended to identify with one group of Jews against another, rather than with Israel as a whole. Christians later came to call the writings of such dissidents from the main group the *apocrypha* (literally, "hidden things") and *pseudepigrapha* ("false writings").²

But the writings collected to form the Hebrew Bible encourage identification with Israel itself. According to the foundation story recounted in Genesis 12, Israel first received its identity through election, when "the Lord" suddenly revealed himself to Abraham, ordering him to leave his home country, his family, and his ancestral gods, and promising him, in exchange for exclusive loyalty, a new national heritage, with a new identity: