

GEZA VERMES
Christian Beginnings
From Nazareth to Nicaea

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Introduction

More than forty years have passed since my initial venture into the 'Jesus' field that culminated with *Jesus the Jew* in 1973. After the publication of twelve further books on the topic, it occurred to me in 2008 to round off the series with a very different book: an attempt to sketch the historical continuity between Jesus portrayed in his Galilean charismatic setting and the first ecumenical council held at Nicaea in AD 325, which solemnly proclaimed his divinity as a dogma of Christianity.

In this attempt at tracing the evolutionary curve, particular emphasis will be laid on the impact of charismatic Judaism on Jesus and on budding Palestinian Christianity. Equally important to note is the influence of Hellenistic thought and mysticism on the early church, which within decades from the crucifixion became very largely Greek in speech and thought. The trend started with Paul and the Fourth Gospel and was responsible from the second century onwards for the impact of Platonic philosophy on the formulation of Christian theological ideas. The final crucial thrust stemmed from the pressure exerted by the emperor Constantine on the bishops of the Nicene Council, compelling them to bear in mind the reverberations of their ongoing religious disputes on the civic peace of the Roman state.

To grasp the full picture, let us first glance at Judaism. As a religion, it essentially applied to persons born into the Jewish nation. In his turn, Jesus himself also exclusively addressed the Jews and ordered his envoys to turn only to 'the lost sheep of Israel'. However, Judaism also accepted Gentile proselytes who were willing to profess the uniqueness of God and embrace all the religious obligations of the Mosaic Law. Ritual initiation was achieved through proselyte baptism, conferred on both male and female candidates, and through the

circumcision of all the male aspirants. It goes without saying that a certain amount of missionary activity was pursued among Gentiles in various periods of Jewish history including the age of Jesus, but how widely it was practised in those days and how deeply the eschatological idea of Israel being the light of the nations penetrated Jewish consciousness continue to be the subject of scholarly debate (see M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 1994). Admission of Gentiles into the early Judaeo-Christian community is originally presumed to have followed conversion to Judaism. The first members of the Jesus movement could hardly have imagined a non-Jew becoming their companion. However, less than twenty years after the crucifixion, the church authorities, urged by Paul, relented and abolished the condition of prior acceptance of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision for converts. They only obliged Gentile candidates for church membership to abide by a few basic rules similar to the Noachic laws which prohibited idol worship, the consumption of blood and certain sexual acts abhorrent to Jews.

Beneath the essentially Law-based Judaism there existed also a current of less formal religion. It was linked to and fed by the prophets, the influential mouthpieces of God, and was sustained down to the age of the rabbis by charismatic holy men. This religion demanded a devout attitude towards the Deity whose protection was solicited against illness, premature death, injustice and war as well as for the poor, the widow and the fatherless. Divine goodwill was also sought for a long and happy life and the well-being of the family, and occasionally in the late biblical period, for the privilege of escaping the underworld in some mysterious way and joining God beyond the grave in some form of afterlife.

In the early stages of biblical history Judaism represented not so much monotheism, the claim that there is only one God, but monolatry, which means that, practically ignoring the pantheon of the other peoples, the Jews revered only their own God. The Bible contains no rational argument against polytheism; the primitive assertion that the foreign deities are idols made by men out of wood, stone or precious metals hardly rates as an intellectual proof of the non-existence of other divine beings (although it continued to be repeated by both Jews and Christians for centuries). In practice, Jews had to resist the social and political attraction of the religions of their neighbouring

peoples (Canaanites, Philistines), and even more so those of their Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman overlords. The worship of foreign gods was seen not so much as an erroneous act as the breach of a mystical monogamous matrimony between the heavenly King and his bride, the chosen people of Israel. It was only under the influence of the prophets of the exilic and post-exilic period in the sixth century BC that proper monotheism, the idea of a single God responsible for the creation of the world and mankind, entered Jewish consciousness, together with the conviction that only this God would ultimately be duly recognized by the whole human race. Monotheism remained the battle cry of the Jews whereas Christians were subjected to criticism by both Jews and pagans for falsely claiming to be monotheists.

Regarding the nature of the Jewish religion, one point is definitely beyond dispute: intellectual religious speculation as such played no part in Hebrew or Aramaic Jewish literature written in the Second Temple period after the Babylonian exile, or in the later centuries of Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud. The works of Philo and Josephus' *Against Apion* form the main exceptions in this field in antiquity. They were, however, composed in Greek either for Gentile readers or for Jews imbued with Hellenism. Jews produced no theological treatises in a Semitic language before the tenth century AD with the one possible exception of the first century BC 'Instruction on the two Spirits' incorporated into the Cave 1 manuscript of the Qumran Community Rule, in which the divine purpose of creation and the destiny of mankind are summarily expounded.

Judaism was primarily a religion of deeds. Apart from subscribing to a single doctrinal proposition concerning the oneness of God, it essentially amounted to a way of life. In the Temple or the synagogue, at home or in the workplace, religion was enacted through obedience to rules believed to have been laid down by the Deity. These rules, above all the Law of Moses, were handed down and interpreted by the caste of the Levitical priests, who were considered the divinely appointed guardians of justice and piety. Their monopoly remained uncontested until the second century BC when lay intellectuals, the Pharisees, whose authority stemmed from their learning, began to challenge them. The leadership of the Pharisees was to be taken over by their heirs, the rabbis, after the destruction of the Temple.

The religion of Jesus was essentially an appeal for eschatological action but subsequent Christianity, though it also insisted on deeds and for a time remained eschatological, was turned by Paul and John into a religion of believing. Notwithstanding its Jewish roots, it developed into a fundamentally distinct movement, which had already become creed-based with Ignatius of Antioch from the start of the second century AD, and took a philosophical turn with Justin in the mid-second century. The features dominating Christianity were belief concerning the nature of the Deity, the definition of Jesus Christ's person and of his work of salvation, and the redemptive function of the one true church. On authentic faith depended whether someone was within the church or outside it. Personal conduct in the religious domain came second to belief. Repentance, though early Christian rigorists allowed it only once after baptism, healed sin, and through penance every wrong could be put right as long as faith persisted.

Compared to Judaism, Christianity's cosmopolitan character constituted the second essential difference. Within decades after the crucifixion, the church turned away from the Jewish Temple and soon after AD 70 Christian supersessionism began, founded on the view that the destruction of Jerusalem and its sanctuary proved the rejection of Judaism by God and its replacement by a new people of God. Also by the end of the first century, increasing Jewish unresponsiveness to the preaching of the apostles and missionaries brought about an ever-increasing Hellenistic-Gentile takeover of the Jesus movement. They were preoccupied with the role of Christ in the salvation of mankind, his superterrestrial pre-existence entailing divine generation prior to time and his instrumentality in the creation of the cosmos before history began. The way of thinking of the Church Fathers was very different from that of Jesus. The principal task the prophet from Nazareth set in front of his Galilean followers was the pursuit of the Kingdom of God in the immediacy of the here and now. By the early fourth century the practical, charismatic Judaism preached by Jesus was transformed into an intellectual religion defined and regulated by dogma.

This book is meant to guide readers along the evolutionary path from the Jesus of history towards the Christ deified at the Council of Nicaea.

G. V.

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I

Charismatic Judaism from Moses to Jesus

The idea of charisma, envisaged in general terms, was first put on the map by the renowned German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920):

The charismatic hero does not deduce his authority from codes and statutes, as is the case with the jurisdiction of office; nor does he deduce his authority from traditional customs or feudal vows of faith, as is the case with patrimonial power. The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds. (H. H. Gerth (ed.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 1979, pp. 248–9)

The phrase ‘charismatic Judaism’ was introduced into the biblical scholars’ terminology in 1973 in my *Jesus the Jew*. As some readers may find the phrase baffling, I will start this book with a survey of the phenomenon in the scriptural narrative from the early stages of Israelite history to the first century AD, in other words, from Moses to Jesus.

The ordinary, formal, non-charismatic Jewish religion of the Old Testament age was centred on Temple and Torah, that is, the Law of Moses. The Bible reports that after the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites first worshipped in a mobile tent-sanctuary in the wilderness of Sinai, and after the settlement in Canaan they did so in numerous temples in various Palestinian locations; finally, following the closure of the provincial cult places, they worshipped in a single sanctuary in the capital, Jerusalem.

The Torah, on the other hand, represented a continuously evolving obligatory religious teaching relating to the Jewish way of life. Both the conduct of worship and the instruction and enforcement of the law were in the hands of a hereditary priesthood – first of the whole tribe of Levi and then, from the late seventh century BC onwards

when only Jerusalem functioned, of the privileged priestly family of Aaron. From the mid-second century BC onwards, the lay Pharisees began to compete with the priests as interpreters of the Law, including the rules relating to Temple ceremonies.

A little earlier rivalry broke out within the ranks of the priesthood too. After the murder of the high priest Onias III in 171 BC, his son, Onias IV, turned his back on Jerusalem and set up a competing sanctuary at Leontopolis in the delta of the Nile in Egypt. Indeed, his descendants continued to officiate there until their schismatic centre of worship had to share the fate of Jerusalem, being destroyed by the Romans in AD 73/74. When the family of the Maccabees had taken over the pontificate in Jerusalem in 152 BC, their opponents, the Qumran Essenes, abandoned the national sanctuary and substituted for it a spiritual Temple within their community in which prayer and holy life replaced offerings and sacrifices, although they hoped to take charge of the national cult in the capital again at the end of time. Despite these internal upheavals, Jerusalem remained the focal point of cultic activity, especially during the three annual pilgrim festivals for most Palestinian Jews as well as for the pious visitors from the Diaspora. Temple worship came to an end in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the great uprising of the Jews against Rome. From then on the synagogues, already religious centres outside Jerusalem in the Holy Land and beyond its borders, became the only focal points of Jewish cultic activity.

Yet ever since the early centuries, beside the organized type of priestly religion there existed another variety. It claimed to be based on direct contact with the divine. On the highest level, this stream was represented by revelation-based prophetic Judaism. It was the religion of Moses at the burning bush and on the summit of Mount Sinai, and inherited by the Old Testament prophets, prominent figures who remonstrated with the rulers of Israel and sought to inspire the people. Their words have survived in the Bible.

On a less exalted level, there was also throughout the ages a popular religion, cut off from the public centres and priestly officialdom but equally marked by charismatic manifestations of ecstasy and wonder. As it was not part of mainstream religiosity and was often in conflict with kings and temple personnel, it was only sporadically recorded. It persisted nevertheless until the age of Jesus and beyond,

indeed down to modern times both among Jews in the phenomenon of the Hasidic *Wunderrebbe* and among Pentecostal Christians of diverse denomination. Without this kind of charismatic Judaism the typical features of the religion of Jesus and early Christianity cannot be truly grasped.

THE BIBLICAL PERIOD

Charisma, or the display of divinely granted power, is attested in the Bible from Mosaic times to the epoch of the New Testament, but its most emphatic biblical pageant occurred roughly between 1000 and 800 BC. The trend was connected with three early prophetic figures – Samuel, Elijah and Elisha – who were also known as ‘men of God’. To comprehend the kernel of charismatic Judaism, the concepts of ‘prophet’ and ‘man of God’ need therefore to be scrutinized.

To begin with prophecy, according to the English dictionary definition a prophet is a teacher who foretells the future, and ‘to prophesy’ is a transitive verb that implies the conveyance of a divine message. The Hebrew root *nun-bet-aleph* (‘to prophesy’) transmits a notion very different from the corresponding terms in Greek, Latin or modern languages. It does not refer to the announcement of a heavenly plan or instruction but instead, using the reflexive form of the verb, it describes the prophesying state. In fact, such an individual was seen as experiencing prophetic frenzy or ecstasy, caused by the divine spirit responsible for the prophet’s strange behaviour. The nearest modern equivalent is the demeanour of Muslim mystics known as Sufis or whirling dervishes, who in the course of an ecstatic dance cut and wound themselves, or (in a less extreme form) the trance of exalted worshippers in Pentecostal churches.

The state of ‘prophecy’ first appears in a toned-down form in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. Moses, a visionary endowed with miraculous power, was its representative par excellence. Before transmitting the divine Law to the Jews he was under the spell of the spirit of God.

Never since has arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that

the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of Israel. (Deut. 34:10–12)

The spirit that inspired Moses was transferred also on to the seventy elders of his council. On that particular occasion they all behaved as prophets (Num. 11:24–5). Moreover, two of them, Eldad and Medad, did not so to speak sober up, and spirit-possessed they carried on prophesying (Num. 11:26–9).

However, the main evidence relating to charismatic prophecy is contained in later stories. For example, the Books of Samuel and Kings regularly refer to the ecstatic bands of the ‘sons of prophets’ linked to the local Jewish sanctuaries. Saul, the future first king of Israel, was seen in their company in the proximity of the shrine of Gibeah. They produced rapturous music, and their ecstasy was contagious. So Samuel announced to Saul: ‘The spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person’ (1 Sam. 10:6, 10).

Pagan cultic prophets served also in the high places of worship of the Canaanite deity, Baal. In the ninth century BC the prophet Elijah single-handedly confronted and eliminated 450 of Baal’s prophets on Mount Carmel. Whether the Jewish ‘sons of prophets’ wounded themselves with swords and lances as the Canaanites did (1 Kings 18:28) is not explicitly stated. Yet even three hundred years later, the Jewish prophet Zechariah asserted that wounds on a man’s body revealed his prophetic status (Zech. 13:6).

The popular religion in the period of Samuel, Saul and David was filled with spirits and ghosts. In a telling anecdote Saul, facing the threat of the powerful army of the Philistines, first sought to discover through legitimate means God’s plan for the outcome of the impending battle. When the Israelite prophets and dream interpreters turned out to be useless, in his despair the king turned to forbidden intermediaries (1 Sam. 28:3–20). But finding wizards proved difficult, as Saul had wiped them out earlier in his reign, in obedience to the Torah that outlawed sorcery (Lev. 20:27). Nevertheless, his men managed to ferret out the only female medium still hiding in the country, the notorious witch of Endor. She was ordered to summon up the spirit of the recently

deceased Samuel from the underworld to find out from him the fate in store for the king and his host. Samuel announced imminent and total disaster: 'The Lord will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines' (1 Sam. 28:19).

In addition to the practitioners of the occult and to the ecstatic 'sons of prophets', we also find outstanding personalities designated as 'men of God'. Their activity has been described in a magisterial essay by J. B. Segal ('Popular Religion in Ancient Israel', 1976). Such persons were seen as possessing specific God-given qualities, enabling them to proclaim and demonstrate before kings and princes the authority of their divine patron, to take care and solve the problems of common people, and, above all, to heal the sick. Their peculiar power was directly attributed to the active presence of God's spirit in them. The folkloristic context in which they appear constitutes the natural setting of charismatic Judaism.

As mentioned earlier, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha are the chief representatives of this class, but they also bear the title of 'seer' or prophet. Samuel told Saul, whom he was soon to anoint as ruler of his people, not only how to find his father's stray donkeys, but also what to do with Israel's enemies (1 Sam. 9:1-21). The 'men of God' were not meek and mild: Samuel himself massacred the Amalekite enemies of the Jews, and Elijah did the same to the prophets of Baal after miraculously defeating them in a contest that proved the superiority of his God (1 Kings 18). He is also reported to have brought down lightning on soldiers dispatched to arrest him (2 Kings 1:9-12). The story recalls the two impulsive apostles of Jesus who wanted to punish with fire from heaven the unwelcoming Samaritans (Lk. 9:54). A shocking episode relates to Elisha who cursed and killed a group of impertinent children (2 Kings 2:23-4) as the young Jesus did to a playmate, according to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (Greek text B), for having hit him with a stone. Usually, however, the charismatic power of the ancient men of God served generous and loving purposes. They are typified by Elijah and his successor, Elisha, the heir of a 'double share of his spirit' (2 Kings 2:9).

Unsophisticated in appearance and wearing, like his future reincarnation, John the Baptist in the Gospels, a furry cloak and a leather

loincloth (2 Kings 1:8; see Mt. 3:4) Elijah like Moses (see Exod. 33) was granted a vision of God on Mount Horeb, which the prophet reached after travelling forty days without food or drink (1 Kings 19:8). His mystical experience is presented even more dramatically than that of the Lawgiver. Instead of hiding in a cleft of the rock like Moses when the Lord went past him (Exod. 33:21-3), Elijah was allowed to experience directly the divine encounter, which started with a fright and ended gently in a communion of silence. It was in a quiet whisper that God chose to reveal himself to Elijah, thus insinuating the inward depth and beauty and the mystical quality of the charismatic religion.

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Both Elijah and Elisha were celebrated wonder-workers. Elijah is depicted as randomly appearing and disappearing (1 Kings 18:12) until at the end he suddenly vanished, taken to heaven by a whirlwind and a chariot and horses of fire (2 Kings 2: 11). His cloak, inherited by Elisha, was seen as a miracle-working instrument (2 Kings 2:7-8, 13-14). Elijah, having been fed by ravens while hiding in a wadi (1 Kings 17:2-6), miraculously multiplied flour and oil for the Sidonian widow, whose charity provided him with bed and board during the great famine (1 Kings 17). Also adopting a peculiar yoga-type praying position, he produced rain that restored life in the country after a long drought (1 Kings 18:41-5).

Both Elijah and Elisha were worshipped as healers. Elijah revived the son of the widow who sheltered him. Like Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-33), Elijah reproached God for his unfair treatment of the widow, and resuscitated the boy by transmitting to him his own life force:

He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber . . . and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?' Then he stretched himself upon the

child three times, and cried out to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again.’ The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child . . . and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, ‘See, your son is alive.’ (1 Kings 17:19–23)

Elisha comes up with a performance that is portrayed in equally spectacular terms. Thanks to his intervention, a long-time childless woman from Shunem and her aged husband miraculously produced a son (2 Kings 4:8–17), but a few years later the boy suddenly died and his mother laid the body on the prophet’s bed and informed Elisha.

The charismatic healing procedure is described in marvellous detail. First Elisha sent his staff with his servant to touch the face of the child, but the mission failed. So the man of God rushed to the house and delivered a charismatic kiss of life, whereupon seven sneezes marked the departure of the evil spirits responsible for the boy’s death.

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:32–5)

Charisma was attached even to the dry bones of Elisha, which are reported to have restored to life a corpse that was thrown into the prophet’s grave and thus accidentally came into contact with his remains (2 Kings 13:20–21).

Elisha’s reputation as a miraculous healer was widespread and persuaded the Syrian general Naaman, stricken with a severe skin disease, to seek his intervention. At the Israelite king’s advice Naaman visited the man of God. Elisha, without the courtesy of welcoming the Syrian dignitary, bluntly ordered him through his servant to wash himself seven times in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10). Outraged, Naaman was on the point of returning home, but his attendants persuaded him to do as the prophet told him. Miraculously ‘his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy’ (2 Kings 5:14).

Miraculous feeding was another charismatic speciality according to the Old Testament. Elijah ensured the survival of his Sidonian benefactress by a continuous supply of food during the famine (1 Kings 17:8-16), and Elisha, like Jesus was to do in his time, managed to quell the hunger of a hundred people with a few loaves of bread, and there was even some left over (2 Kings 4:42-4).

On the political level, Elisha was venerated as the saviour of his country for compelling the Arameans to end the siege of Samaria by means of the imaginary sound of approaching chariots and horses (2 Kings 7:6) and for giving victory to King Joash of Israel over Aram by symbolically shooting arrows in the direction of the Syrian camp (2 Kings 13:14-19).

With the development of the prophetic movement the popular features (frenzy and miraculous elements) receded from the foreground of charismatic Judaism and the phenomenon became more intellectual and didactic. The task of God's spokesmen was to proclaim a message relevant to contemporary events as well as to forecast the future. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah continued to advise or criticize Jewish kings, but on the whole they ceased to be depicted as miracle-workers.

In the eighth and seventh centuries BC some prophets firmly clashed with the priests and were critical of the Temple worship. In their eyes concern with the punctilious performance of the sacrificial cult detracted from the primacy of true religion and morality.

Amos uttered unforgettable words:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
 and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain-offerings,
 I will not accept them;
 And the offerings of well being of your fatted animals
 I will not look upon.
 Take away from me the noise of your songs;
 I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
 But let justice roll down like waters,
 and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Am. 5:21-4)

Isaiah was no less emphatic:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats ...
Trample my courts no more;
Bringing offerings is futile;
Incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation –
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity ...
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;
Cease to do evil, learn to do good;
Seek justice, rescue the oppressed;
Defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isa. 1:11–17)

Micah, in turn, contrasts the religion of the prophets inspired by God with the Temple cult administered by priests:

With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:6–8)

Some of the messengers of God, like Amos, while claiming divine authority for their message, refused to be called prophets as they were not ecstatics. ‘I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son’, he told the priest of Bethel (Am. 7:10–15). It took centuries for the popular charismatic colouring of prophecy to wear off. Even as late as the time of

Zechariah (about 520–500 BC), messengers of God wished to conceal that they were prophets.

On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, but each of them will say, I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth. (Zech. 13:4–5)

Nevertheless, Isaiah still practised charisma when he cured the mortally sick King Hezekiah by applying a fig cake to his boils and demonstrated his divine call by causing the shadow on the royal sundial to move backwards instead of forwards (2 Kings 20:1–11; Isa. 38:1–8). Ezekiel, too, behaved strangely when he mimed his visions of the future. For example, he enacted the siege of Jerusalem by hitting a brick on which the likeness of a city was scratched, baked barley cakes on human dung to typify the future impure state of his compatriots when exiled to an unclean land, and walked through a hole in the city wall carrying a bag on his back to insinuate the deportation of the Jews to Babylonia (Ezek. 4). Ezekiel's charismatic mimicry was seen as endowed with efficiency: the subsequent events were attributed to his play-acting.

A final point must be made before concluding this sketch of charismatic Judaism in the biblical period. In Jewish thought of the pre-prophetic and prophetic age sickness was understood to be the divine punishment of sin, and conversely, healing was envisaged as God's prerogative. A clear expression of this attitude may be found in the post-exilic account of the end of the Judaeen king Asa. While the pre-exilic historiographer was full of his praises (1 Kings 15:11–15), the fourth/third century BC author of 2 Chronicles criticized him for his lack of trust in God, for instead of asking for divine help, he mistakenly put his trust in the doctors (2 Chron. 16:12). The only humans qualified by the Torah to act in a quasi-medical capacity were the priests, whose task was to diagnose the onset and the cessation of 'leprosy', and to administer sundry purificatory rites required in the case of menstruation, childbirth, etc. (Lev. 12–15).

Prophecy, the original home of the charismatic religion, was supposed to have come to an end with the three last representatives of the movement during the period of the restoration of the Temple of Jerusalem under Persian rule (late sixth to fifth century BC). According to an

early rabbinic tradition (tSotah 13:2), the death of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi marked the end of the impact of the Holy Spirit on Israel through prophecy, but not the cessation of direct contact with God: it was maintained through an audible divine pronouncement designated in rabbinic literature as *bat qol* or the daughter of a voice. While the *bat qol* played an important role among the rabbis as well as in the Gospels (see p. 30), history does not support this view about the end of prophecy. In fact, in the final period of the Second Temple era (second century BC to the first century AD) prophets were still expected, as the first Book of the Maccabees (1 Mac. 4:46; 14:41), the Qumran Community Rule (1QS 9:11) and the New Testament (Mt. 11:9; 13:57; 21:11; Mk 6:4; Lk. 4:24; 7:16, 26; 24:19) demonstrate.

Moreover, the Dead Sea Scrolls have disclosed that a new form of prophecy, namely revealed exposition of the ancient predictions, was introduced by the Teacher of Righteousness, the anonymous priestly founder of the Qumran Community, in the middle of the second century BC. He is represented as a charismatic interpreter of biblical prophecy, having been enlightened by God about the true meaning of the obscure auguries recorded in Scripture.

God told Habakkuk to write down what would happen to the last generation, but he did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which he said, 'That he who reads may read it speedily' (Hab. 2:2), interpreted, this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets. (1QpHab. 7:1-5; see also 2:5-10)

Three Essene prophets, dating from the late second century BC to the beginning of the first century AD are mentioned by name in Josephus: Judas, Menahem and Simon (*Ant.* 13.311-13; 15.373-8; 17.345-8).

Charismatic Judaism refused to lie down.

EARLY POST-BIBLICAL LITERATURE

From occasional attestations in the Apocrypha and the pre-Christian Jewish writings known as the Pseudepigrapha, it is apparent that prophetic/popular religion continued in a semi-clandestine form during the last centuries of the Old Testament era. Like in earlier times,

its prominent mode of expression was the healing of the sick. Despite the importance of medicine in the ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible has little to say about Jewish physicians. The Law of Moses mentions Egyptian medical experts (Gen. 50:2), but alludes to their Israelite colleagues only once: in connection with the case of compensation an Israelite had to pay if he had injured someone, he was obliged to pay the bill of the physician who cared for his victim (Exod. 21:19).

At the beginning of the second century BC, Jesus son of Sirā, himself a priest from Jerusalem and author of the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Ben Sirā, attempted to reconcile medicine with religion by turning the physician into a spiritual agent of the Almighty (Ecclus 38:1-14). Pious co-operation between repentant patients (Ecclus 38:9-11) and God-fearing doctors was considered the best recipe for cure in the opinion of Ben Sirā. 'There is a time when success lies in their hands, for they too will pray to the Lord that he should grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life' (Ecclus 38:13-14).

In the section of his book known as the Eulogy of the Fathers (Ecclus 44-50), the same sage went on praising the extraordinary power and the miracles of the men of God, Elijah and Elisha. The passage is filled with charismatic associations.

Then the prophet Elijah arose like a fire,
and his word burned like a torch.
He brought a famine upon them,
and by his zeal he made them few in number.
By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens,
and also three times brought down fire.
How glorious you were, O Elijah, in your wondrous deeds!
And who has the right to boast which you have?
You who raised a corpse from death
and from Hades, by the word of the Most High;
who brought kings down to destruction,
and famous men from their beds;
who heard rebuke at Sinai
and judgments of vengeance at Horeb;
who anointed kings to inflict retribution,
and prophets to succeed you.

You who were taken up by a whirlwind of fire,
 in a chariot with horses of fire;
 you who are ready at the appointed time, it is written,
 to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury,
 to turn the heart of the father to the son,
 Blessed are those who saw you,
 and those who have been adorned in love;
 for we also shall surely live.

It was Elijah who was covered by the whirlwind,
 and Elisha was filled with his spirit;
 in all his days he did not tremble before any ruler,
 and no one brought him into subjection.
 Nothing was too hard for him,
 and when he was dead his body prophesied.
 As in his life he did wonders,
 so in death his deeds were marvellous. (Ecclus 48:1-14)

These comments of Ben Sira on the two great charismatic prophets of the distant past, recall the summary of the career of Elisha by the first century AD Jewish historian Josephus, who speaks of ‘astounding and marvellous deeds’ (*thaumasta gar kai paradoxa erga*, *Ant.* 9.182), performed through his prophetic power, a memorable expression, which recurs in Josephus’ portrait of Jesus (see p. 32).

Jesus ben Sira’s compromise between religion and medicine turned out to be superfluous and the charismatic-angelic type of healing continued to be popular in Jewish thinking. In post-exilic times illness kept on being linked to evil spirits and control over devils was in the hands of angels, in particular those of Raphael, the healing angel whose name means ‘God has cured’. He first appears in the apocryphal Book of Tobit, probably dating from between 400 and 200 BC. In Tobit, Raphael is the God-appointed travelling companion of the young Tobias and his protector against the devil Asmodeus. This evil spirit, infatuated with Tobias’s fiancée, the beautiful Sarah, sought to kill him on their wedding night as he had already murdered seven of her previous husbands before they could consummate the marriage. Raphael provided his young protégé with prophylactics, the heart and the liver of a fish, which Tobias had to put on burning incense. Repelled by the smell, the demon ran away, and Raphael pursued the

evil spirit to the other end of Egypt and bound him there, thus saving Tobias's life. The same idea of angelic assistance is encountered in the First Book of Enoch, roughly contemporaneous with the Book of Tobit, of which pre-Christian Aramaic fragments have been found at Qumran. It was again the task of Raphael to overpower Azazel, the prince of demons (1 En. 10:1-7).

It is important to remember that the practitioners of charismatic Judaism learned the arcane art of healing from divinely inspired secret books, ascribed to two biblical characters, the patriarch Noah and King Solomon. According to the Book of Jubilees, Noah was taught by an angel how to conquer diseases and master demons through the use of medicinal herbs (Jub. 10:10-14). Solomon was the other source of charismatic wisdom and medicine. Biblical tradition already attributed to him some of the most important sapiential books of Scripture – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs – and the author of Ecclesiasticus further enlarged on the scriptural portrait by emphasizing Solomon's international fame (Ecclus 47:15, 17).

Josephus, the near contemporary of Jesus, supplied much additional folkloristic material.

[Solomon] composed a thousand and five books of odes and songs, and three thousand books of parables and similitudes; for he spoke a parable about every kind of tree, from the hyssop to the cedar; and in like manner also about birds and all kinds of terrestrial creatures, and those that swim and those that fly . . . And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved and left behind forms of exorcism with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return; and this kind of cure is of very great power among us to this day. (*Ant.* 8.42-6)

In addition to general statements about Noah and Solomon regarding healing and exorcism, Jewish literary sources of the age of Jesus have preserved a number of new stories of cure and resuscitation by holy men of the past. The Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran Cave 1, dating from the second century BC, presents the patriarch Abraham as a charismatic controller of demons (1QapGen. 20:16-29). When his wife Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's harem, the patriarch's prayer rendered the king and

all his male courtiers impotent to safeguard Sarah's virtue. When Pharaoh offered to release her, Abraham used his charismatic power against the demon: 'So I prayed [for him (Pharaoh)] . . . and I laid my hands on his [head]; and the scourge departed from him and the evil [spirit] was expelled [from him], and he lived' (1QapGen. 20:8-29).

The third/second-century BC Hellenistic Jewish historian Artapanus presents Moses too as a miracle-working agent of God. We learn from him that Moses was thrown into prison by Pharaoh when the king heard of his intention to liberate the Jews, but at nightfall a series of miracles happened: the gates of the jail opened; some guards fell asleep while others died, and all their weapons fell to pieces. Thus Moses was able to walk out of the prison and unhindered he entered the royal bedchamber. The angry Pharaoh inquired about his god's name in order to curse it, and the sacrosanct Tetragram was murmured into his ears. He dropped dead at once, but miraculously Moses revived him (Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.27, 22-6).

A further anecdote of considerable importance comes from a Qumran writing akin to the Book of Daniel and probably dating from the first century BC. The fictional speaker is the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus, who declares that an unnamed Jewish charismatic, probably Daniel, pardoned his sins and simultaneously cured his disease. He is described as a *gazer*. The noun is mentioned in the Book of Daniel (2:27; 4:6; 5:7, 11) next to words signifying magicians, dream interpreters and astrologers. Literally a *gazer* issues decrees or commands; hence it is interpreted as 'exorcist' because the corresponding verb in rabbinic literature is connected to deliverance from demonic possession (see below, p. 24). 'The words of the prayer uttered by Nabunai king of the l[and of Ba]bylon, [the great] king . . . I was afflicted [with an evil ulcer] for seven years . . . and an exorcist (*gazer*) pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from [among the children of the exile of Judah]' (4Q242).

In this Prayer of Nabonidus we have a remarkable anticipation of the Gospels with forgiveness of sins and healing the sick treated as connected notions (cf. Mk 2:8-11). Exorcism and the religious cure of diseases are testified to also in a historical account by Josephus relating to a story belonging to the first Jewish rebellion against Rome (AD 66-70). 'I have seen', Josephus asserts,

a certain Eleazar, a countryman of mine, in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, tribunes and a number of other soldiers, free men possessed by demons, and this was the manner of the cure: he put to the nose of the possessed man a ring which had under its seal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon, and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon through the nostrils, and, when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to come back into him, speaking Solomon's name and reciting the incantations which he had composed. (*Ant.* 8.46)

The root in question, the mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), grew, according to Josephus, in Transjordan at Baara, not far from Herod the Great's palace at Machaerus. It was believed to be endowed with medicinal and exorcistic qualities (see Joan Taylor, 'Roots, Remedies and Properties of Stones', 2009, p. 236), but its collection was considered very dangerous.

Flame-coloured, and in the evening emitting a brilliant light, [the mandrake root] eludes the grasp of persons who approach with the intention of plucking it, as it shrinks up and can only be made to stand still by pouring on it either the urine of a woman or her menstrual blood. Even then to touch it is fatal unless one succeeds in carrying off the root itself, suspended from the hand. Another innocuous mode of capturing it is as follows. They dig all around it, leaving but a minute portion of the root covered; they then tie a dog to it and the animal rushing to follow the person who tied him easily pulls it up, but instantly dies . . . After this none need fear to handle it. With all these attendant risks, it possesses one virtue for which it is praised; for the so called demons . . . are promptly expelled by this root, if merely applied to the patients. (*War* 7.180–85)

Eleazar, like a circus magician, arranged a tangible proof of the departure of the evil spirit for the benefit of his high-ranking Roman spectators, Vespasian and his entourage: '[He] put a cup or foot-basin full of water a little way off and commanded the demon, as it went out of the man, to overturn it and make known to the spectators that he had left the man' (*Ant.* 8.46–8).

The conjecture of scholars that this Eleazar was an Essene broadens the historical perspective. The Essenes together with the Therapeutai, the Egyptian offshoot of the sect, were world-renowned as healers and

ascetics. A number of scholars, including myself, link the name ‘Essenes’ (*Essaioi* in Greek) with the Aramaic *assaya* or ‘healers’, which is also one of the meanings of the Greek *therapeutai*. Josephus, in his detailed portrayal of the Essene community, emphatically states, ‘They apply themselves with extraordinary zeal to the study of the works of the ancients choosing, above all, those which tend to be useful to body and soul. In them they study the healing of diseases, the roots offering protection and the properties of stones’ (*War* 2.136).

Philo of Alexandria, in turn, describing the Therapeutai in the opening lines of his book *On the Contemplative Life*, specifies that their name has the double meaning of healers and worshippers of the Deity.

I have spoken [in *Every good man is free*] of the Essenes who followed with zeal . . . the life of action . . . I will presently . . . say whatever is meet to be said about those that have embraced contemplation . . . The purpose and will of the lovers of wisdom is discovered in their very name and title, for they are most fitly called healers, male and female. Either by reason of their professing an art of healing more excellent than that which is found in cities – for this heals men’s bodies alone, but theirs souls also . . . or because they have been educated by nature and the holy laws to worship the true Being. (*Contemplative Life* 1–2)

Judging both from the New Testament and rabbinic literature, the simplest form of exorcism was through direct command, but it could be made specifically binding by the mention of the devil’s name. Jesus once inquired about the identity of the Gadarene demon and learned that it was called ‘Legion’ (Mk 5:9). In later rabbinic literature we find the early second century AD rabbis Simeon ben Yohai and Eleazar ben Yose exorcising the daughter of a Roman emperor by ordering the devil called Ben Temalion to depart (bMeil. 17b).

Jewish exorcists and healers of the inter-Testamental age were no doubt also equipped with prayers and spells of the Solomonic kind. There exist plenty of magic formulae of a later vintage, but a few incantation texts belonging to the turn of the era are also available. One, found in Cave 4 at Qumran, was part of the Essene teacher’s formulary against a variety of evil spirits.

[God’s] dominion is over all the powerful mighty ones
and by the power of his might all shall be terrified and shall scatter,

and be put to flight by the splendour of the dwelling of his kingly glory.
 And I, the Master, proclaim the majesty of his beauty
 To frighten and terrify all the spirits of the destroying angels
 And the spirits of the bastards, the demons,
 Lilith, the howlers and the yelpers ...
 They who strike suddenly to lead astray the spirit of understanding
 And to appal their hearts. (4Q510, 3-5)

Furthermore, there is a song preserved in Pseudo-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, produced in the first century AD. It is attributed to David, whose task was to ensure the well being of King Saul by restraining the evil spirit which was upsetting him.

And in that time the spirit of the Lord was taken away from Saul and
 an evil spirit was choking him. And Saul sent and brought David and
 he played a song on his lyre by night. And this was the song he played
 for Saul in order that the evil spirit might depart from him.

Darkness and silence were before the world was made,
 And silence spoke a word and the darkness became light.
 Then your name was pronounced ...
 And after these was the tribe of your spirits made.
 And now do not be troublesome ...
 Remember Tartarus [Hell] where you walk
 Let the new womb from which I was born rebuke you,
 From which after a time one born from my loins will rule over you.
 (LAB 60.1-3)

By contrast, it is noteworthy that according to the Gospels Jesus used only words of command, and never had recourse to exorcistic formulae.

RABBINIC LITERATURE

To complete the survey of the evidence capable of shedding light on charismatic Judaism, a summary glance must be cast on rabbinic literature's portrayal of prophet-like characters from the age of Jesus (100 BC-AD 100). Two such individuals stand out, Honi-Onias, surnamed 'the circle-drawer', from the time of the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 BC, and Hanina ben Dosa, a first-century AD

Galilean holy man. Both resembled the prophet Elijah for their rain-making power; moreover, like Elijah and Elisha, Hanina was also celebrated as a miraculous healer and a general wonder-worker.

The earliest rabbinic version of the Honi anecdote is cast in a humorous mould, suggesting that some rabbis with pedestrian mentalities were not wholehearted admirers of charismatic piety.

Once they said to Honi the Circle-drawer: 'Pray that it may rain' . . . He prayed but it did not rain. What did he then do? He drew a circle, stood in it, and said to God: 'Lord of the universe, your children have turned to me because I am like a son of the house before you. I swear by the great name that I will not move hence until you be merciful to your children.' It then began to drizzle. 'I have not asked for this,' he said, 'but for rain to fill cisterns, pits and rock cavities.' There came a cloud-burst. 'I did not ask for this, but for a rain of grace, blessing and gift.' It then rained gently. (mTaan. 3:8)

Here and elsewhere we encounter a much loved and spoiled son, who is teased by God, his loving father. But the child persists with his demands until the father gives in to his pestering. Conventional rabbis considered Honi's behaviour disrespectful and deserving censure. Indeed, Jewish charismatics, Jesus among them, had a propensity to shock bourgeois sensitivities.

Josephus, writing for both Gentiles and Jews, is wholly reverential. He calls Honi-Onias 'the Righteous'. There is no question of accusing him of irreverence; Josephus depicts him as an admirable personality who, after averting national disaster by ending a disastrous drought, acted as an efficient mediator between God and the Jews. He even becomes a tragic hero who pays with his life for his refusal to take sides in the civil strife in Jerusalem between the Hasmonaeon high priests Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II in the mid-60s BC.

Now there was a certain Onias, who, being a righteous man and dear to God, had once in a rainless period prayed to God to end the drought and God had heard his prayer, and sent rain; this man hid himself when he saw that the civil war continued to rage but he was taken to the camp of the Jews, and was asked to place a curse on Aristobulus and his fellow rebels, just as he had, by his prayers, put an end to the rainless period. But when in spite of his refusals and excuses he was forced to speak by

the mob, he stood up in their midst and said, 'O God, king of the universe, since these men standing beside me are Thy people, and those who are besieged are also Thy priests, I beseech Thee not to hearken to them against these men, nor to bring to pass what these men ask Thee to do to those others.' And when he prayed in this manner the villains among the Jews who stood round him stoned him to death. (*Ant.* 14.22-4)

Charismatic power ran in the family of Honi and two popular grandsons walked in the footsteps of the venerable grandfather. Abba Hilkiyah was apparently a simple farmer, like Elisha before his meeting with Elijah. The title 'Abba' (which means 'Father') worn by both grandsons recalls the style of address of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:12; 6:21; 13:14). Abba Hilkiyah was asked for rain by the rabbis, no doubt when their own formulaic supplications remained ineffective. When the rain arrived, Hilkiyah denied that he had anything to do with it – a recurrent feature of modesty in stories told about charismatics, seen through, however, by the shrewd rabbis.

Once when the world was in need of rain the rabbis sent to him two rabbis that he should pray and it should rain. They went to his house, but did not find him. They went to the field and found him ploughing. [Returning to his house he said to his wife] 'I know that these rabbis came to see me for the rain. Let us go up to the roof and pray. The Holy One, blessed be He, will perhaps accept our prayer and there will be rain.' . . . The clouds appeared . . . He came down and asked the rabbis: 'Why did the rabbis come?' 'The rabbis sent us to you, Sir, that you might pray for rain.' He replied, 'Blessed be the Lord who put you beyond the need of Abba Hilkiyah's prayer.' But they said, 'We know that this rain has come through you.' (*bTaan.* 23ab)

Such self-effacement calls to mind Jesus' attribution of healing to the sick person's faith.

Hanan the Shy (literally 'the Hiding'), Honi's other grandson, displayed similar modesty in parallel circumstances. It is worth noting that Hanan called God 'Abba', thus anticipating the terminology used by Jesus (see p. 48).

When the world was in need of rain, the rabbis sent school children to him who pulled the corners of his garment and said to him, 'Abba, Abba, Give us rain!' Hanan said, 'Lord of the universe, Do it for the

sake of these who do not distinguish between the Abba who gives rain and the Abba who does not.' And rain came. (bTaan. 23b)

A younger contemporary of Jesus, Hanina ben Dosa, from the Galilean town of Arab (Arava or Gabara), is portrayed as a versatile charismatic; he was not just a rain-maker. He is introduced as the pupil of Yohanan ben Zakkai, the renowned Pharisee teacher active in the period of the first Jewish war. According to the Talmud, Yohanan spent eighteen years in Galilee in Hanina's hometown before moving to Jerusalem as the leader of the Pharisees. Only one peculiar story associates Hanina with rain, which he is depicted as capable of stopping when he was in discomfort, although he then restarted it to ensure that his compatriots would not suffer because of him.

Hanina ben Dosa was once travelling along the road when it began to rain. He said, 'Lord of the universe, the whole world is in comfort while Hanina is in distress.' The rain stopped. When he reached his house, he said, 'Lord of the universe, the whole world is in distress while Hanina is in comfort.' The rain re-started. (bTaan. 24b)

Most of Hanina's other tales of wonder-working are connected with healing and protecting people from physical harm, but there is also a tale about his encounter with the queen of demons. Two particularly significant healing stories have survived, connected with the cure of the sons of famous rabbis, Yohanan ben Zakkai, Hanina's master, and Rabban Gamaliel, St Paul's presumed teacher.

It happened when Rabban Hanina ben Dosa went to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to study Torah, the son of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai fell ill. He said to him, 'Hanina, my son, pray for him that he may live.' He put his head between his knees and prayed and he lived. (bBer. 34b)

Hanina's charismatic healing was performed by effective prayer. Since the cure immediately followed his intercession, people linked the two and believed that his words actually effected the cure. The curled-up praying posture conducive to absolute concentration, which he adopted when he healed in absentia the son of Yohanan ben Zakkai, recalls Elijah's supplication on Mount Carmel when he bowed down on the ground and pressed his face against his knees (1 Kings 18:42).

A parallel healing narrative, dealing with the miraculous cure of the son of Rabban Gamaliel, has survived in two versions; both resemble the cure of the servant of a Roman centurion in Capernaum by Jesus (Mt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10).

The shorter one comes from the Palestinian Talmud.

It happened that Rabban Gamaliel's son fell ill, and he sent two pupils to Rabban Hanina ben Dosa in his town. He said to them, 'Wait until I go to the upper room.' He went to the upper room then he came down. He said to them, 'I am assured that Rabban Gamaliel's son has now recovered from his illness.' They noted the time. In that hour he [the boy] asked for food. (yBer. 9d)

The Babylonian Talmud expands the narrative and inserts an explanation relating to Hanina's awareness concerning the efficacy of his words. For him smooth and spontaneous communication with God indicated success, whereas uninspired, rambling prayer was a bad omen for the patient.

It happened that when Rabban Gamaliel's son fell ill, he sent two pupils to Rabban Hanina ben Dosa that he might pray for him. When he saw them, he went to the upper room and prayed. When he came down, he said to them, 'Go, for the fever has left him.' They said to him, 'Are you a prophet?' He said to them, 'I am no prophet, nor am I a prophet's son, but this is how I am favoured. If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he is favoured; if not, I know that the disease is lethal.' They sat down, wrote and noted the hour. When they came to Rabban Gamaliel, he said to them, 'By the worship! You have neither detracted from it, nor added to it, but this is how it happened. It was at that hour that the fever left him and he asked us for water to drink.' (bBer. 34b)

Some New Testament commentators, unhappy about the use of rabbinic anecdotes in the interpretation of the Gospel accounts of Jesus, try to diminish their significance by reducing the status of the leading personality from charismatic healer to that of an ordinary pious Jew praying for the sick. The sick were cured by God and not by them. But this is a present-day pedestrian way of perceiving the issue. In the mind of the contemporaries of Honi and Hanina, the miracle, be it rain or cure, resulted from their words. The case is clearly stated in the Abba Hilkiyah episode above. The self-effacing holy man

ascribed to God the termination of the drought ('Blessed be the Lord who put you beyond the need of Abba Hilkiyah's prayer'), but the judicious rabbis were able to distinguish between an explanation inspired by humility and the real truth: 'We know that this rain has come through you', they tell him (bTaan. 23ab).

In addition to his reputation as healer of the sick, Hanina was also admired, like St Patrick in Ireland, as the protector of his community from poisonous snakes. Apropos of the concentration demanded before prayer, the Mishnah cites the example of the pious men of old who never allowed external circumstances to disturb the mental absorption. They would ignore even the greetings of a king and would fail to notice a snake wound around their foot (mBer. 5:1).

The rabbinic saga about Hanina goes further: he was so lost in prayer that he did not even notice that he was bitten by a reptile. At the end, the story was turned into a proverb.

They say concerning Rabban Hanina ben Dosa that when he stood and recited the Tefillah, that a poisonous snake/lizard bit him, but he did not interrupt his prayer. His disciples went and found the creature dead at the entry to its hole. They said, 'Woe to the man bitten by a snake, but woe to the snake which has bitten ben Dosa.' (tBer. 3:20)

This basic anecdote developed into a more colourful tale using the imagery of the serpent of Paradise. The reference to Hanina's heel in mBer. 5:1 ('even though a snake wound around his heel') is inspired by Genesis 3:15, where the serpent strikes Adam's heel.

It happened that there was a place in which there was a snake and it injured people. They went and reported it to Rabban Hanina ben Dosa. He said to them, 'Show me [my children] its hole.' He placed his heel on the opening of the hole. The snake came out, bit him and died. He put it on his shoulder and carried it to the school. He said to them, 'See my children, it is not the snake that kills but sin.' In that hour they said, 'Woe to the man who meets a snake, but woe to the snake that meets Rabban Hanina ben Dosa.' (yBer. 9a)

The anecdote has New Testament resonance and brings to mind Jesus' saying, 'Behold I have given authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you' (Lk. 10:19; see also Mk 16:18). It is worth noting in passing

that the charismatic is depicted as unconcerned with contracting ritual uncleanness through touching a dead animal (cf. Lev. 11:29–31).

The confrontation between men of God and the devil, ending with the victory of the former, is also part of the imagery of charismatic Judaism. Jesus is depicted as tempted by Satan; Hanina ben Dosa has an altercation with Agrath the daughter of Mahlath, a story which appropriately ends with expulsion of the queen of the demons. Rabbinic etiquette required people not to walk alone in the street at night, in order to bar gossip and avoid the demons lurking in the dark.

Do not go out alone at night . . . for Agrath the daughter of Mahlath and eighteen myriads of destroying angels are on the prowl, and each is empowered to strike. In former times she was seen every night. Once she met Rabban Hanina ben Dosa and said to him, 'Had there been no commendation from heaven, "Take heed of Hanina and his teaching", I would have harmed you.' He said to her, 'If I am so highly esteemed in heaven, I decree that you shall never again pass through an inhabited place.' (bPes. 112b)

Hanina's superior status was revealed by a commendation from heaven, no doubt through a divine 'daughter of voice'. Also to effect the exclusion of the demonic queen from areas of human habitation, the Hebrew verb 'I decree' (*'ani gozer*) is used with the same exorcistic meaning as the Aramaic term (*gazer*) that occurs in the Qumran Prayer of Nabonidus (see above, p. 15).

Hanina also enjoyed the reputation of being the performer of a multitude of sundry miracles. For instance, in the Talmud, he enabled his wife to bake bread although there was no flour in the house (bTaan. 24b–25a). He also turned vinegar into oil to correct his daughter's mistake in pouring the wrong liquid into the Sabbath lamp (bTaan. 25a), indirectly recalling Jesus' turning water into wine at Cana (Jn 2:1–11).

Whole-hearted admiration by simple people went hand in hand with suspicion, resentment and jealousy on the part of spokesmen of officialdom, as was also experienced by the prophets of the Old Testament and by Jesus in the Gospels. The filial tone employed by Honi in his commerce with God infuriated Simeon ben Shetah, the chief Pharisee of his age. 'Simeon ben Shetah sent to him a message. "Had you not been Honi, I would have excommunicated you. But what can

I do to you? You importune God, yet he performs your will like a son that importunes his father and he performs his will” (mTaan. 3:8).

Both Honi and Hanina were criticized for behaving as spoiled children towards their heavenly Father and petty-minded rabbis liked to belittle their achievements, but Yohanan ben Zakkai did not spare Hanina’s praises and recognized his superior spiritual power. ‘Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said, “Even if ben Zakkai had squeezed his head between his knees all day long, no attention would have been paid to him”’ (bBer. 34b).

As has been observed, the historian Josephus was fully positive in his judgment of Honi, and considered him a wholly praiseworthy character who deserved the epithet of ‘the Righteous’. His esteem was shared by later tradition, too. Thus Honi was compared to the prophet Elijah, both being agents in leading the Jews back to God: ‘No man did bring people to the service of the Holy One blessed be He as well as Elijah and Honi the circle-drawer’ (Gen. Rabbah 13:7).

Echoing popular admiration, the rabbinic praises of Hanina ben Dosa were no less emphatic. ‘When Hanina ben Dosa died, the men of deed ceased’ (mSot 9:15). Taking into account the New Testament’s use of ‘deeds’ (*erga*) with reference to Jesus (Mt. 11:2; Lk. 24:19), there are good grounds to identify a ‘man of deed’ with a miracle-worker. Also, implicitly associated with Elijah, Hanina received the highest acclamation when he was identified as the person for whom the world to come was created (bBer. 61b). According to another legend, Hanina’s closeness to God, his sonship of God, was constantly proclaimed by a heavenly voice. ‘Every day a *bat qol* was issued [from Mt Horeb] and declared, The whole world is sustained on account of Hanina, my son, but Hanina my son is sustained by one kab of carob from one Sabbath eve to another’ (bTaan. 24b). The similar praise of Jesus is recorded at his baptism and transfiguration (Mt. 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk. 3:22; Mt. 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk. 9:35).

This survey of over a millennium of Jewish history makes it possible to compile a list of the most notable features of the charismatic religion. Negatively, this type of Judaism had little or nothing to do with priesthood, Torah and Temple worship. The issue of legal observance, so essential for the priests and Levites and for the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, hardly ever arose in the charismatic context.

The only references to 'proper' conduct were associated with the criticism by conventional rabbis of the nonconformist behaviour of Honi and Hanina ben Dosa. There is only a single case of sacrificial worship: it is connected with the competition between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, introducing a miraculous fire from heaven to prove the superiority of the God of Israel.

Conflict between prophets and priests was endemic. Amaziah ordered Amos out of the royal sanctuary of Bethel (Am. 7:10-13) and the clash between prophets and Temple personnel on the subject of sacrificial worship is apparent in the citations from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, and in the famous speech of Jeremiah against the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Jer. 7:1-14). In the first century BC Honi was stoned to death for not supporting either of the two competing high priests.

Turning now to religious activity of mystical character, this is thought to have resulted from the direct influence of the spirit of God, an influence that according to popular tradition was made manifest by charismatic behaviour. Such spirit-produced action is attributed to Moses, to the seventy elders of his council (and in particular, to Eldad and Medad), to Elijah and Elisha, who inherited the double share of Elijah's spirit, and obviously to Jesus. It was characteristic of all the 'men of God' down to the age of the rabbis.

The influence of the divine spirit is often marked by outward signs such as the ecstatic demeanour of the charismatics, the 'sons of prophets', Elijah, Elisha and possibly Ezekiel (as well as the transfiguration of Jesus in the New Testament), and occasionally by heavenly voices speaking to most prophets, including Elijah and Elisha, or giving testimony about Honi or Hanina ben Dosa (and Jesus).

Among the special activities of charismatics figure the ending of famine by the bringing of rain (Elijah, Honi, Hanina ben Dosa), the ability to survive on an insufficient amount of food and drink (Elijah, Hanina ben Dosa), the performance of sundry miracles (Elijah, Elisha, Hanina ben Dosa) and – first and foremost – the healing of the sick or resuscitation of the recently deceased (Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Hanina ben Dosa and Jesus).

The personal impact of the envoy of God plays a paramount role in charismatic Judaism. Contact with him is an essential stepping-stone in the march towards the Deity. In the post-prophetic age the

charismatics were publicly proclaimed by heavenly voices (Hanina ben Dosa, Jesus) and their part played in salvation history became the subject of intense religious speculation. In the Old Testament saga Elijah was mysteriously translated to heaven in a fiery chariot drawn by horses of fire. Honi and Hanina ben Dosa were celebrated as protectors of humankind, and the entire Pauline and Johannine literature, not to mention centuries of theological effort deployed by the Christian church, sought to expound Jesus' relation to God and the redeeming character of his life and death.

In short, without a proper grasp of charismatic Judaism it is impossible to understand the rise of Christianity.