

*not in word only:
the associates, deeds, and controversies
of jesus in apocalyptic context*

WE HAVE SEEN THAT WORDS ARE ALWAYS BOUND TO CONTEXTS THAT HELP DETERMINE THEIR MEANING. CONTEXTS AFFECT NOT ONLY WORDS, BUT EVERYTHING WE SEE, DO, AND EXPERIENCE AS WELL—every gesture, action, and activity, every natural event, every movement, every tactile substance. Everything has a context, and when you change the context, you change what it means.

What does it mean if you see a person avidly raising an arm straight over his head with index finger pointed upward? It depends. Is it a football fan celebrating in the end zone after the last game of the season, an excited Pentecostal convert at a tent revival, a terrified spectator at an aerial show, or a distressed first-grader in the back row, an hour after drinking too much orange juice for breakfast? Actions are intelligible only in context.

Not just Jesus' words, but also his deeds, experiences, and personal interactions were set in a context. We can't, of course, reconstruct his context in toto. But we can have a general idea about it, and that general idea is far better than nothing—better, for example, than thinking that something Jesus did can make sense *without* a context. In fact, when we examine the things Jesus is reputed to have done in light of the criteria we have already discussed, and consider the results in light of the apocalyptic context that we have already established, we find a

very nice confluence between his sayings that we have already considered and his actions that we will consider now. I might add that some other historical reconstructions of Jesus falter on just this score, making it appear that what he said and what he did had no relationship to one another. But as it turns out, if we accept the evidence cited at some length earlier that Jesus was an apocalypticist, we can make good, coherent sense not just of his sayings, but also of his deeds and experiences.

Jesus' Baptism

As we have seen, our first solid information about Jesus as an adult comes in the traditions about his baptism. We don't know exactly how old he was at the time; only Luke claims that he was "about thirty" (Luke 3:23) and there's no way to track down his source of information. Still, if Jesus was in fact born during the reign of Herod the Great (as both Matthew and Luke attest), and if he was executed when Pilate was the prefect of Judea (26–36 CE), then he must have been at least in his thirties at the time of his baptism.

We have already seen that there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus was baptized by and became a follower of John the Baptist. The baptism itself is described in our earliest narrative, Mark, followed by the other Synoptics; it is alluded to independently by John (Mark 1:9–11; Matt. 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:29–34). The Q source gives a lengthy account of John's apocalyptic preaching, evidently at the very outset of its account of Jesus' teaching (see Luke 3:7–18; Matt. 3:7–12).

Moreover, throughout his teachings, Jesus refers back to his former leader, John. For example, in Q he asks the crowds who they thought John really was and states that John was the greatest man ever to live (Matt. 11:7–19; Luke 7:24–35; also G.Thom. 46); in Mark he confronts his opponents by asking them about John's authority: "Was the baptism of John from God or humans?" (Mark 11:30); and in the Fourth Gospel he claims that John testified to his own message (John 5:31–36). It's striking that Luke associates Jesus and John while both are still in their mothers' wombs (Luke 1:39–45—this is not multiply attested, of course, but it shows that the tradition of their association was very strong). Somewhat more plausibly, the Fourth Gospel explicitly shows that Jesus' own earliest followers were former disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35–42; cf. Acts 1:21–22). This is a tradition that is supported, to some extent, by the independent account in the book of

Acts, which indicates that even long afterward some of John's followers became Christian followers of Jesus (Acts 19:1–7). It's interesting to note that, like John, Jesus' followers practiced baptism; at one point in the Fourth Gospel even Jesus himself is said to have gotten into the act (see John 3:22; 4:1–3).

We have seen that John was an apocalypticist. The fact that Jesus associated with him early on, prior to his own ministry, and then continued to speak of him with fondness later, shows that whatever their differences in emphasis—many interpreters have seen John more as a fiery preacher of repentance in the face of the terrible onslaught soon to come and Jesus more as a proclaimer of the good news that God will soon right the wrongs in the world for all those who practice his will by loving one another—the two saw eye to eye on the coming judgment of God and the need to prepare for it.

So the first thing to note about Jesus' activities is that he began by associating with and showing his devotion to an apocalyptic preacher of repentance, John the Baptist. With whom else did he associate, and how can one make sense of these associations in an apocalyptic context?

Jesus' Associates

Some of the best-attested traditions about Jesus are that he had a number of followers. Most of these followers appear to have been lower-class, illiterate peasants, not known for their scrupulous observance of the Law. Some of them were women and people of dubious moral reputation. Many appear to have been social outcasts—for example, the impoverished and diseased. If you're known by the company you keep, it's no wonder that the pious religious leaders and members of the Jewish aristocracy did not, as a rule, think much of Jesus. Still, these associations make sense, given Jesus' apocalyptic message. In the coming judgment, the first will be last and the last first. Most of his followers could hope to be at the very top of the new heap.

Jesus' Followers

The fact that Jesus sought people out to follow him—a somewhat unusual practice in the ancient world—is multiply attested in the tradition, with accounts of the call of his first disciples preserved in independent narratives of Mark (1:16–20; see Matt. 4:18–22), L (Luke 5:1–11; this is a different account from Mark and Matthew), and John (1:35–51). All of these accounts, despite their many differences, por-

tray these first followers as lower-class fishermen, engaged in sea-to-hand-to-mouth operations. They evidently left their jobs behind (along with their houses and families, as we saw in chapter 10) to follow Jesus, ministering with him in expectation that the end would soon arrive and they would receive back many times over that which they had forsaken (see, e.g., Mark 10:28–31).

The Twelve

One of the best-attested traditions of our surviving sources is that Jesus chose twelve of his followers to form a kind of inner circle. It is interesting that all three Synoptics list the Twelve, but some of the names differ in Luke's list (Mark 3:14–19; Matt. 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16). This may suggest that everyone knew that there were twelve of these people, but not everyone knew who they were. The "twelve" are also mentioned independently by Paul (1 Cor. 15:5), John (6:67; 20:24), and Acts (e.g., 6:2). Moreover, some of the traditions involving the Twelve pass the criterion of dissimilarity. For example, in the Q source Jesus says to his twelve disciple: that in the "age to come, when the Son of Man is seated upon his glorious throne, you also will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 22:30). This is not a tradition that was likely to have been made up by a Christian later, after Jesus's death—since one of these twelve had abandoned his cause and betrayed him. No one thought that *Judas Iscariot* would be seated on a glorious throne as a ruler in the Kingdom of God. The saying, therefore, appears to go back to Jesus, and indicates, then, that he had twelve close disciples whom he predicted would reign in the coming Kingdom.

That final point should perhaps be emphasized. Why did Jesus choose *twelve* disciples? Why not nine, or fifteen? The selection of twelve was not, in fact, an arbitrary act. It wasn't that Jesus happened to like the number, or that he just picked the fellows he most wanted to hang around with. In view of the Q statement cited above, it appears that the twelve were chosen as a representative number with apocalyptic significance. Just as the nation of Israel whom God had called to be his people was originally comprised of twelve tribes, so too in the new age, when God once more ruled his people, they would again comprise twelve tribes. The twelve disciples represent the true Israel, the people of God who would enter into his glorious Kingdom when the Son of Man arrives. This would be a real kingdom, with real rulers; and they would be Jesus' close followers. Those who were obedient to his words would enter into this Kingdom. Jesus' choice of twelve disciples, in

other words, was a symbolic action meant to convey a concrete lesson about the coming Kingdom.

Jesus evidently taught his disciples about their roles in the Kingdom (see, e.g., the Q quotation given above)—which may account for another firmly rooted tradition, that the message had gone to some of the disciples' heads. For they are occasionally depicted as arguing among themselves over which of them would be the greatest when the Kingdom arrived. Nothing like a vision of glory to raise a lower-class peasant into an egomaniacal, if imaginary, despot. The disputes are found explicitly in our earliest source (e.g., Mark 9:34; 10:35–37, 41). Moreover, they appear to lie implicitly behind Jesus' constant reminders to his disciples that only the least will become great, only the last will become first, only those like children will enter the Kingdom, only those who enslave themselves to others will rule over all. These were lessons that the future lords of the earth evidently needed to learn.

Jesus, the Wicked, and the Outcast

Jesus associated with others, of course, besides the Twelve. Best-attested are the "wicked" and "outcast" of various stripe. Unlike most upright religious leaders among the Jews of his day (and most upright Christians among his followers ever since!), Jesus chose to spend his time with people who were widely seen as beyond the pale. It is multiply attested all over the map, for example, that Jesus associated with "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:15–16; Q [Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:29]; M [Matt. 21:31–32]; L [Luke 15:1]; see also Mark 2:13–17 and Luke 19:1–10). Moreover, this is not the sort of tradition—our Master particularly enjoyed the lowlifes and hookers—that later Christians would be likely to invent.

Who were these people? "Tax collectors" were probably employees of the large tax-collecting corporations that milked the Galilean population for tribute that would be paid to Rome for the upkeep of the country and the protection of its borders. When Galilee was ruled by a Jewish king in those days, he would pay the tribute to Rome directly; taxes that were collected, then, would come straight to him. It's never spelled out directly in our early traditions just *why* lower-level tax collectors were so widely despised (do *you* need to explain why you dread an IRS audit?). But scholars have made plausible guesses: such people may have been notoriously dishonest, greedy, and hard-nosed, collecting excessive funds with the threat of imperial force in order to line their own pockets, all in the service of a foreign power that had taken over the land that God had promised to the Jews themselves. Even if

some individual tax collectors bucked the trend and were reasonably honest (not every American politician is a bald-faced liar), as a group they were widely despised as misanthropic and godless. The term "sinners," as I've mentioned earlier, did not designate a particular kind of sinner (e.g., "prostitutes"), but a general class of people who made little or no effort to do what God commanded in the Law of Moses.

These are the people—the despised and the irreligious—that Jesus appears to have associated with. How does one make sense of this? Did Jesus simply exercise poor judgment, as some of his opponents, and even his own followers, occasionally charged (see Mark 2:13–17 and Q, Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:24)? Did he prefer the dregs of society to the socially respectable? Or were his associations somehow related to his apocalyptic message?

Recall: the Kingdom is not coming for the high and mighty, but for the low and outcast ("tax collectors and prostitutes will go before you into the Kingdom of God," Matt. 21:31; cf. Luke 7:29–30). And Jesus did not see himself as needing to minister to the well, but to the sick (Mark 2:17).

Indeed, there were others besides those blanketed with the term "sinners" who appear constantly in Jesus' company. He befriends wild demoniacs whom no one else will come near (Mark 5:1–20). He converses with and touches outcast lepers (Mark 1:40–46; Luke 17:11–19). He speaks with and (favorably) about Samaritans (who were hated by many Jews as kind of illegitimate half-breeds and heretics; Luke 10:29–37; John 4:4–42). Here again, my point is not that every one of these stories is historically accurate on its own. But they all do point to the well-established tradition that Jesus associated with those who were viewed widely as "undesirables."

Jesus' Women Followers

Jesus associated with women and ministered to them in public. To be sure, his twelve closest disciples were almost certainly men, as one would expect of a first-century Jewish rabbi. It is largely for this reason that the principal characters in almost all of the Gospel traditions are men. But not all of them are. In fact, the importance of women for Jesus' ministry is multiply attested in our earliest traditions. Both Mark and L (Luke's special source), for example, indicate that Jesus was accompanied by women in his travels (Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:1–3), a tradition corroborated by the Gospel of Thomas (G. Thom. 114). Mark and L also indicate that women provided Jesus with financial support during his ministry, evidently serving as his patrons (Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:1–3). In both Mark and John, Jesus is said to have engaged in

public dialogue and debate with women who were not among his immediate followers (John 4:1–42; Mark 7:24–30). Both Gospels also record, independently of one another, the tradition that Jesus had physical contact with a woman who anointed him with oil in public (Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). In Mark's account this is an unnamed woman in the house of Simon, a leper; in John's account it is Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, in her own home.

In all four of the canonical Gospels, women are said to have accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem during the last week of his life and to have been present at his crucifixion (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25). The earliest traditions in Mark suggest that they alone remained faithful to the end: all of his male disciples had fled. Finally, it is clear from the Synoptics, John, and the Gospel of Peter that women followers were the first to believe that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb (Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 23:55–24:10; John 20:1–2; G. Pet. 50–57). These women were evidently the first to proclaim that Jesus had been raised.

There are other interesting traditions about Jesus' contact with women that do not pass the criterion of multiple attestation, including the memorable moment found only in Luke's Gospel when Jesus encourages his friend Mary in her decision to attend to his teaching rather than busy herself with "womanly" household duties (Luke 10:38–42).

What about the contextual credibility of these traditions? It is true that women were generally viewed as inferior to men in the ancient world. But there were exceptions: philosophical schools like the Epicureans and the Cynics, for example, advocated equality for women. Of course, there were not many Epicureans or Cynics in Jesus' immediate environment of Palestine, and our limited sources may suggest that women, as a rule, were generally even more restricted in that part of the empire with respect to their abilities to engage in social activities outside the home and away from the authority of their fathers or husbands. Is it credible, then, that a Jewish teacher would have encouraged and promoted such activities?

We have no solid evidence to suggest that other Jewish rabbis had women followers during Jesus' day. But we do know that the Pharisees were supported and protected by powerful women in the court of King Herod the Great. Unfortunately, the few sources that we have say little about women among the lower classes, who did not have the wealth or standing to make them independent of their fathers or husbands. One consideration that might make the traditions about Jesus' association with women credible, however, is the distinctive burden of his own

apocalyptic message. Jesus proclaimed that God was going to intervene in history and bring about a reversal of fortunes. The last would be first and the first last. Those who were rich would be impoverished and the poor would be rich. Those who were exalted now would be humbled and the humble would be exalted. Jesus associated with the outcasts and downtrodden of society, evidently as an enactment of his proclamation that the Kingdom would belong to such as these. If women were generally looked down upon as inferior by the men who made the rules and ran the society, it does not seem implausible that Jesus would have associated freely with them, and that they would have been particularly intrigued by his proclamation of the coming Kingdom.

Some recent scholars have proposed that Jesus in fact did much more than this, that he preached a "radically egalitarian society"—that is, that he set about to reform society by inventing a new set of rules to govern social relations, creating a community in which men and women were to be treated as absolute equals.¹ This, however, may be taking the evidence too far and possibly in the wrong direction. For as we have seen, there is little to suggest that Jesus was concerned with pushing social "reform" in any fundamental way in this evil age. In his view, present-day society and all its conventions were soon to come to a screeching halt, when the Son of Man arrived from heaven in judgment on the earth. Far from transforming society from within, Jesus was preparing people for the destruction of society. Only when God's Kingdom arrived would an entirely new order appear, in which peace, equality, and justice would reign supreme. This Kingdom, though, would not arrive through the implementation of new social reform programs. It would arrive with a cosmic judge, the Son of Man, who would overthrow the evil and oppressive forces of this world.

To this extent (and, I would stress, *only* to this extent), even though Jesus may not have urged a social revolution in his time, his message had radically revolutionary implications. In particular, we should not forget that Jesus urged his followers to begin to implement the ideals of the Kingdom in the present in anticipation of the coming Son of Man. For this reason, there may indeed have been some form of equality practiced among the men and women who accompanied Jesus on his itinerant preaching ministry—not as the first step toward reforming society from the grass roots, but as a preparation for the new world that was soon to come, when the present age would be brought to its climactic end with the arrival of the Kingdom.

That, in fact, appears to be the message—often unspoken but sometimes stressed—behind all of Jesus' best-known associations. From the outside, Jesus may appear to be nonreligious and unclean, but in fact

the people he befriended and taught represented the outcasts, the lowly, and the despised who would be rewarded when the Son of Man arrives, bringing with him judgment and a Kingdom, to be enjoyed by the unlikely.

Jesus' Early Ministry in Galilee

Throughout our earliest surviving sources, it is quite clear that Jesus spent most of his ministry, if not virtually all of it, in the towns, villages, and rural areas of Galilee (in the northern part of what is now Israel). We don't know how long this ministry lasted. If you were simply to read Mark's Gospel, you would probably assume that it took just under a year, from the early summer when grain had become ripe enough to be eaten from the fields (2:23) until the Passover the following spring (14:12). John's Gospel, though, records three Passover feasts (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), so that here the ministry is assumed to have lasted somewhat over two years.

In any event, even if the dates aren't set in stone, some of the places are. We've seen that Jesus was raised in the small rural village of Nazareth. He appears to have spent nearly all of his time prior to his fateful trip at the end of his life to the big city (Jerusalem) in similar places—either out in the country itself or in villages and small towns (Mark 1:45; 3:7; 4:1; 6:6, 31; etc.). Even though there was a major city within easy walking distance of Nazareth—the much-discussed city of Sepphoris—it is never mentioned in any of our ancient Gospel records. This should perhaps give us pause when considering the widespread claim today among certain scholars (including a number of those associated with the "Jesus Seminar") that Jesus would have been intimately familiar with Greek philosophical traditions, especially those associated with the Cynics, from his many trips to Sepphoris. *What* trips to Sepphoris? Nor is Jesus ever said to have visited the other major city of the region, Tiberias. Jesus was a small-town-and-rural person. His followers, too, were drawn from such places.

Possibly because it was so small and unknown, or possibly because he was not well received there, Jesus did not use Nazareth as the base for his mission, but chose nearby Capernaum instead. This is attested throughout our sources, for example, Mark (1:21; 2:1; 9:33), M (Matt. 4:13), and John (2:12; 6:59). And it is not the sort of thing that later Christians would have had any clear reason to invent—that is, it passes the criterion of dissimilarity—especially since there *were* traditions that people in Capernaum, on the whole, did not take kindly to Jesus'

message (Q: Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15). Capernaum, like Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, was relatively small—archaeologists put its population at the time at around two thousand or less. But it had the advantage of being on the Sea of Galilee, so that to get around one could hop a boat as well as walk. It is from there that Jesus began to engage in an itinerant ministry throughout the region (see, e.g., Q: Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58; 10:1; G.Thom., 14; etc.) visiting local synagogues on the Sabbath (e.g., Mark 1:21; 6:1-6; Matt. 4:23; John 6:59; etc.), teaching any who had the time and leisure to come to hear him speak on other days. Principally he taught Jews, according to almost all of our early sources, with such isolated exceptions as the Syrophenician woman of Mark 7 and the Samaritan woman of John 4. He also reportedly performed amazing feats that kept the crowds coming.

Among other things, this basic sketch of Jesus' activities during his ministry shows yet again how thoroughly Jewish his mission and message were. He was speaking to Jews, often in their own synagogues about their own Scriptures. His own interpretations of these Scriptures caused some surprise, especially, as we'll see momentarily, among those who knew him when he was younger. When not offering interpretations of the Scriptures, he was teaching in parables, using, for example, agricultural and fishing imagery that these Galilean peasants could readily relate to (seeds, weeds, soils, harvests, sheep, shepherds, fish, fishnets, etc.). These teachings, as we have seen repeatedly, related to the coming end of the age.

Intimately connected with this message were the amazing feats that Jesus was widely reported to have done.

Jesus' Miraculous Deeds

Most of the accounts of Jesus' deeds involve the miraculous. Everywhere you turn in our Gospels he is healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, multiplying the loaves, walking on the water, calming the storm, and so on. These miraculous deeds cause special problems for historians, but I want to address a general problem before trying to discuss any of the specifics.

A lot of modern people, of course, believe that miracles are strictly speaking impossible—that is, that they never happen—and that people who think they happen are either deluded or naive. For such people, there is no reason, by definition, to discuss Jesus' miracles, since if miracles don't happen, then Jesus didn't do any. This is sometimes called the "philosophical" problem of miracles.

I do not want to address this particular issue here. For the sake of the argument, I'm willing to grant that miracles—that is, events that we cannot explain within our concepts of how "nature" normally works—can and do happen. There still remains a huge, I'd even say insurmountable, problem when discussing Jesus' miracles. Even if miracles *are* possible, there is no way for the historian to show that they have ever happened.

I'll call this the "historical" problem of miracle. Let me explain the problem at some length.

An Interlude: The Historical Problem of Miracle

I'll begin by considering what people in the modern world mean when they use the term "miracle," in contrast to what people in antiquity meant by it.²

"Miracles" in the Modern World and in Antiquity

People today typically think of miracles as supernatural violations of natural law, divine interventions into the natural course of events. I should emphasize that this popular understanding does not fit particularly well into modern scientific understandings of "nature," in that scientists today are less confident in the entire category of natural "law" than they were, say, in the nineteenth century. For this reason, it is probably better not to speak of supernatural violations of "laws," but to think of miracles as events that contradict the normal workings of nature in such a way as to be virtually beyond belief and to require an acknowledgment that supernatural forces have been at work.

As we will see momentarily, this understanding is itself the major stumbling block for historians who want to talk about miracles, since the historian has no access to "supernatural forces" but only to the public record, that is, to events that can be observed and interpreted by any reasonable person, of whatever religious persuasion. If a "miracle" requires a belief in the supernatural realm, and historians by the very nature of their craft can speak only about events of the natural world, events that are accessible to observers of every kind, how can they ever certify that an event *outside* the natural order—that is, a miracle—occurred?

Before pursuing the question, I should point out that in the ancient world, "miracles" were *not* understood in the quasi-scientific terms that we use today, terms that have been available to us only since the advent of the natural sciences during the Enlightenment. Even in antiquity, of

course, people understood that nature worked in certain ways. Everyone knew, for example, that iron ax heads would sink, and people would too, if they tried to walk on water in the middle of a lake. But in the ancient world, almost no one thought that this was because of some inviolable "laws" of nature, or even because of highly consistent "workings of nature" whose chances of being violated were infinitesimally remote. The question was not whether things happened in relatively fixed ways; the question was who had the power to do the things that happened.

For people in Greco-Roman times, the universe was made up of the material world, divine beings, humans, and animals, with everyone and everything having a place and a sphere of authority. A tree could not build a house, but a person could. A person could not make it rain, but a god could. A normal human being could not heal the sick with a word or a touch, or cast out an evil demon, or bring the dead back to life; but a divine human could, one who was in a special relation to the gods, like Jesus or some other holy man, of whom we know several by name. For such a person to heal the sick or raise the dead was not a miracle in the sense that it violated a "law"; it was "spectacular" in the sense that such things did not happen very often, since few people had the requisite power. And when they did happen, they were a marvel to behold.

This means that for most ancients the question was not whether miracles were possible. Spectacular deeds happened all the time—it was spectacular when the sun came up or the lightning struck or the crops put forth their fruit. It was also spectacular when a divine man healed the blind or cured the lame or raised the dead. These occurrences did not involve an intrusion from outside of the natural world into an established nexus of cause and effect that governs the way things work. For these people there *was* no "closed system" of cause and effect, a natural world that was set over against a supernatural realm. Thus, when spectacular deeds, which people today might call "miracles," occurred, the only questions for most ancient persons were (a) who was able to perform these deeds, and (b) what was the source of their power? Was a person like Jesus, for example, empowered by a god or by black magic?

To agree with an ancient person, therefore, that Jesus healed the sick, walked on water, cast out demons, or raised the dead is to agree first that there were divine men (or magicians) walking the earth who could do such things, and second that Jesus was one of them. In other words, from a historian's perspective, anyone who thinks that Jesus did these miracles has to be willing in principle to concede that other people did them as well, including the pagan holy man Apollonius of Tyana, the Roman emperor Vespasian, and the Jewish miracle worker

Hanina ben Dosa—all of whom were reputed to be miracle workers. The evidence that is admitted in any one of these cases must be admitted in the others as well.

But what evidence could there be? Here is where we get into our problem.

The Historian and Historical Method

One way to approach the question is by reflecting for a moment on the ways in which historians engage in their craft, in contrast, say, to the ways natural scientists engage in theirs. The natural sciences operate through repeated experimentation, as they seek to establish predictive probabilities based on past occurrences. To illustrate on the simplest level: suppose I wanted to "demonstrate" that a bar of iron will sink in a tub of lukewarm water, but a bar of Ivory soap will float. I could perform a relatively simple experiment by getting several hundred tubs of lukewarm water, several hundred bars of iron, and several hundred bars of Ivory soap. By tossing the bars of iron and soap into the tubs of water, I could demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that one will sink and the other will float, since the same result will occur in every instance. This does not necessarily prove that in the future every bar of iron thrown into a tub of lukewarm water will sink, but it does provide an extremely high level of what we might call presumptive probability. In common parlance, a "miracle" would involve a violation of this known working of nature: it would be a miracle, for example, if a preacher prayed over a bar of iron and thereby made it float.

The historical disciplines are not like the natural sciences, in part because they are concerned with establishing what has happened in the past, as opposed to predicting what will happen in the future, and in part because they cannot operate through repeated experimentation. An occurrence is a one-time proposition; once it has happened, it is over and done with. Since historians cannot repeat the past in order to establish what has probably happened, there will always be less certainty. It is much harder to convince people that John F. Kennedy was the victim of a lone assassin than to convince them that a bar of Ivory soap will float.

And the farther back you go in history, the harder it is to mount a convincing case. For events in the ancient world, even events of earth-shattering importance, there is sometimes scant evidence to go on. All the historian can do is establish what probably happened on the basis of whatever supporting evidence happens to survive.

This is what makes alleged miracles so problematic. On one level, of course, everything that happens is improbable. Suppose you were in a

minor car accident last night. The chances of that happening were probably not very great, maybe even remote. But it's not so unlikely as to defy the imagination. And if fifteen years from now someone wanted to show that you did have that accident last night, they could appeal to certain kinds of evidence (newspaper articles, police reports, eyewitness accounts) and demonstrate their historical claim to most people's satisfaction. They could do this because there is nothing improbable about the event itself. People have accidents all the time, and the only issue would be whether you had one on the night in question.

What about events that do not happen all the time? As events that defy all probabilities, miracles create an inescapable dilemma for the historian. Since historians can only establish what probably did happen in the past, and the chances of a miracle happening, by definition, are infinitesimally remote, they can never demonstrate that a miracle *probably* happened.

This is not a problem for only one kind of historian—for atheists or agnostics or Buddhists or Roman Catholics or Baptists or Jews or Muslims; it is a problem for all historians of every stripe. Even if there are otherwise good sources for a miraculous event, the very nature of the historical discipline prevents the historian from arguing for its probability. Take a hypothetical example. Suppose that three otherwise credible eyewitnesses claimed to see Reverend Jones of the Plymouth Baptist Church walk across his parishioner's pond in 1926. The historian can certainly discuss what can be known about the case: who the eyewitnesses were, what they claimed they saw, what can be known about the body of water in question, and so forth. What the historian cannot claim, however, at least when discussing the matter as a historian, is that Reverend Jones actually did it. This is more than we can know, using the canons of historical knowledge. The problem of historical probabilities restrains our conclusion. The fact is that we all know several thousand people, none of whom can walk across pools of water, but all of whom at one time or another have been mistaken about what they thought they saw, or have been misquoted, or have exaggerated, or have flat out lied. To be sure, such activities may not be probable, especially for the upstanding members of the Plymouth Baptist Church. But they would be more probable than a miracle that defies the normal workings of nature. Thus if we as historians can only say what probably happened, we cannot say—as historians—that the good Reverend probably performed a miracle.

I should emphasize that historians do not have to deny the possibility of miracles or deny that miracles have actually happened in the past. Many historians, for example, committed Christians and observant

Jews and practicing Muslims, believe that they have in fact happened. When they think or say this, however, they do so not in the capacity of the historian, but in the capacity of the believer. In the present discussion, I am not taking the position of the believer, nor am I saying that one should or should not take such a position. I am taking the position of the historian, who on the basis of a limited number of problematic sources has to determine to the best of his or her ability what the historical Jesus actually did. As a result, when reconstructing Jesus' activities, I will not be able to affirm or deny the miracles that he is reported to have done.

Jesus' Reputation as an Exorcist

There can be little doubt that whether or not there exist supernatural evil spirits that invade human bodies to make them do all sorts of vile and harmful things, Jesus was widely thought to be able to cast them out, restoring a person to health. Scholars who believe in demons, of course, may well think that Jesus actually did exorcise them. Scholars who don't believe in them have come up with their own explanations—for example, that these were all psychosomatic illnesses, or that they represent internalized conflicts created through a sense of personal helplessness in the face of Roman colonialization of the land.³ And indeed, there have been some very interesting cross-cultural studies of demon possession and exorcism in our own time that lend support to one or another of these views.⁴ In my judgment, though, it is not really possible to know exactly what happened. As I've pointed out, the historian cannot say that demons—real live supernatural spirits that invade human bodies—were actually cast out of people, because to do so would be to transcend the boundaries imposed on the historian by the historical method, in that it would require a religious belief system involving a supernatural realm outside of the historian's province. But we *can* say that Jesus was widely recognized by people of his own time—who *did* believe that demons existed and could be exorcised—to have the powers to do just this.

In fact, Jesus' exorcisms are among the best-attested deeds of the Gospel traditions. Individual accounts are scattered throughout the first part of Mark (1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29); in M (Matt. 9:32-34; cf. Luke 11:14—this may be Q); and L (Luke 13:10-14; cf. 8:2). Moreover, the sources themselves consistently summarize Jesus' activities as involving exorcisms (e.g., Mark 1:32-34, 39; 3:9-12; see also Acts 10:38), and the theme that Jesus could and did cast out demons is documented in multiply attested forms throughout the sayings materials, for example, Mark, Q, and L (Mark 3:22; Matt.

12:27–28; Luke 11:15, 19–20; 13:32). Such traditions cannot pass the criterion of dissimilarity, of course, since Christians who thought that Jesus had overcome the powers of evil might well have wanted to tell stories to show that he did. But they are contextually credible, to the extent that we know of other persons, both pagan and Jewish, who were said to have had power over demons, including, for example, the great pagan holy man, Apollonius of Tyana, who lived a bit later in the first century (see also Mark 9:38).

In sum, without making a faith claim, historians can't say that Jesus actually cast evil spirits out of people. But we can say that he probably did have some pretty amazing encounters with people believed to be demon-possessed, and that his ability to cast the demons out was seen as a characteristic aspect of his ministry. Moreover, the controversy over him was not about whether he had this ability but whether he had this power from God or the devil. As reported in our earliest surviving Gospel:

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying that "He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons" (Mark 3:22).

Jesus' response to the charge is telling, especially in the version preserved in the Q source:

If I cast demons out by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?... But if I cast demons out by the spirit of God, behold the Kingdom of God is come upon you. Or how is anyone able to enter into the house of a strong man and steal his property, if he does not first bind the strong man? Only then can he plunder his house (Matt. 12:27–30; cf. Luke 11:19–23).

Note that everyone—Jesus and his opponents together—admits not only that Jesus can cast out demons, but that other Jewish exorcists can do so as well. Moreover, for Jesus, casting out demons signified the conquest over the forces of evil (the "strong man," in this case, would represent the main power opposed to God, Satan). And most important, Jesus' exorcisms are interpreted apocalyptically. They show that the Kingdom of God was at the doorstep. Just as Jesus' followers had begun to experience the life of the Kingdom by following his teachings, so too they understood that he himself had begun to manifest God's power in the present over the forces of evil, which would be completely destroyed at the coming of the Son of Man. Strikingly, this apocalyptic view is the earliest understanding of the widespread tradition that Jesus could cast out demons.

Jesus' Reputation as a Healer

Much the same can be said about Jesus' reputation as a healer. On numerous layers of our traditions Jesus is said to have healed those with various ailments—fever, leprosy, paralysis, hemorrhaging, lameness, blindness, and so on—and even to have raised some who had already died (see Mark 5:35–43 and John 11:38–44). Whatever you think about the philosophical possibility of miracles, it's clear that Jesus was widely reputed to have done them.

Let me add that he was also known to have performed other miracles not associated with healing physical ailments, though dealing still with the "natural" world—for example, multiplying the loaves, walking on water, stilling the storm. Such miracles, too, are attested in multiple sources. Like the exorcisms, they cannot, of course, pass the criterion of dissimilarity.

They are contextually credible to the extent that there were other persons from the ancient world—lots of them, in fact—who were also known to be able to do some fairly miraculous things, either through prayer—as in the case of some other Galilean Jews from about that time, such as Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the circle-drawer, who were reputed to have had God's ear about matters of particular concern—or directly because of their own holiness, for example, Apollonius of Tyana. It may be worth noting that many of the healing and nature miracles of Jesus in fact are closely related to miracles described in the Hebrew Bible of other Jewish prophets, and invariably, Jesus comes off looking even better than his prophetic predecessors. The prophet Elijah, for example, had to engage in some real personal theatrics to raise a child from the dead (1 Kings 17:17–24); Jesus could do it with just a word (Mark 5:35–43). Elijah's successor, Elisha, allegedly fed a hundred people with just twenty barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42–44); Jesus fed over five thousand (not counting the women and children!) with just five (Mark 6:30–44). Elisha was able to make an ax head float on the water (2 Kings 6:1–7); Jesus could *himself* walk on the water (Mark 6:45–52).⁵

Interestingly enough, these activities were not taken in our earliest sources to be signs that Jesus was himself God. They were the sorts of things that Jewish prophets did. Jesus simply did them better than anyone else. Moreover, the earliest traditions again assign an apocalyptic meaning to these acts. Recall: in the Kingdom there would be no more disease or death. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. In a small way, then, the Kingdom was already becoming manifest. And there was not much time before the end finally arrived. According to an account in Q, when John the Baptist wanted to know whether to expect

another one to come or whether Jesus was himself the final prophet before the end, Jesus reportedly replied:

Tell John the things you have seen and heard: the blind are regaining their sight, the lame are starting to walk, the lepers are being cleansed, the deaf are starting to hear, the dead are being raised, and the poor are hearing the good news! (Luke 7:22; Matt. 11:4-5).

The end has come, and the Son of Man is soon to appear in the climactic act of history, after which there will never again be any who are blind, lame, leprous, deaf, or poor. Jesus represented the final prophet before the end, who was already overcoming the forces of evil in the world.

The Reception of Jesus

You would think that Jesus would have been one popular fellow. Someone who could cast out demons, heal the sick, and raise the dead would be handy to have around in a pinch. Remarkably though—really, this is one of the most remarkable things about our earliest accounts—the traditions about Jesus are quite unified that he was not at all well received. Even though some of his followers were completely devoted to him, and in fact had great hopes for him, he was rejected by the vast majority of the people who heard of him or saw him in person and squarely opposed by the religious leaders of his own people.

Widespread Rejection

There is no doubt that Jesus' closest followers were firmly committed to him—at least until the end, when one of them betrayed him and all the others abandoned him, possibly for fear of their own lives. At this stage of our discussion, though, I want to stress the flip side of the coin. The devotion of his closest followers notwithstanding, throughout his public ministry Jesus was regularly and consistently subjected to rejection and scorn. He was rejected by his own family, by people living in his hometown, by those living in other villages and towns throughout Galilee, by the Jewish crowds, by the Jewish religious leaders, by the Jerusalem aristocracy, and eventually, of course, by the Roman overlords.

For those who know about the annunciation story in the Gospel of Luke (where the angel Gabriel informs Mary who her son will be) it may seem odd that Jesus was rejected by his own family. But the theme

is attested in multiple and independent traditions, and is not the sort of thing later Christians would be likely to make up. That is, it passes our criteria. Early in his ministry, according to our first account, his family tried to seize him from the public eye because they thought he had gone mad (Mark 3:21); he in turn spurned them when they came to see him (Mark 3:31-35). His brothers are said in a later source not to have believed in him (John 7:5), and it is striking that he had no relatives among his closest followers. Paul may imply that it was only after his resurrection that Jesus' brother James became a believer (1 Cor. 15:7). It is difficult to know what his mother actually thought about him; it is only in our latest Gospel, John, that she is said to be with him until the end, although the book of Acts indicates that she was one of the early believers immediately after the resurrection (John 19:25-27; Acts 1:14).

Jesus was clearly rejected in his own hometown in Nazareth, as shown not only by the rejection scene recorded in Mark 6:1-6 (cf. Matt. 13:53-58) and amplified by independent traditions in Luke 4:16-30, but even more by his widely attested saying that "a prophet is not without honor except in his own country" (Mark 6:4; John 4:44; "in his own village," G.Thom. 31). In the earliest form of the saying, Jesus indicates that the prophet is also dishonored "among his own relatives and in his own house," suggesting yet again that he was not well received in the Joseph and Mary household.

It is clear from the Q materials (which are early and here pass the criterion of dissimilarity), that other towns and villages of Galilee rejected Jesus:

Woe to you Chorazin, woe to you Bethsaida. For if the great deeds that have been done among you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago and sat in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you Capernaum, you will not be exalted up to heaven will you? No, you will descend into hell (Luke 10:13-15; Matt. 11:20-24).

It is worth observing that Jesus' response to his own rejection is couched in such clear apocalyptic terms of judgment, condemnation, and destruction.

There are indications throughout our traditions that Jesus was by and large rejected more generally by most of the people who either heard him or heard of him. Not only in his own town and the surrounding areas, but also in a place like Gergesa on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, he is clearly not welcomed, at least according to our earliest

Gospel (Mark 5:17). This would make sense of (a) Jesus' multiply attested lament that even though foxes and birds have places to stay, he has nowhere (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58); (b) the implication of many of his parables that the *reason* the Kingdom has such a small and inauspicious beginning is that most of his proclamation is falling on deaf ears (e.g., the parable of the sower: Mark 4:1-9; G.Thom. 9); and (c) his claims, in a completely independent source, that he is "hated by the world" (John 15:18). As we'll see, this rejection by the crowds who heard him becomes nearly complete during his final days.

Above all, of course, Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders of his own people. At the end of his life, as we'll see, it was his rejection by the aristocracy that ran the Temple—the Sadducees and the chief priests—that ultimately led to his execution by the Romans. During his itinerant ministry in Galilee, though, Jesus did not much concern himself or tangle with the priests in far-off Jerusalem. Most of his controversies were with local Jewish authorities, including the Pharisees and the experts in the Law known as scribes, who thought that his teachings were wrong, that he misunderstood what God wanted, that he and his followers profaned the Law, and that, as a result, his powerful deeds could not come from God but were from the devil.

Controversies with the Pharisees

I should emphasize that the controversies Jesus had with other Jewish teachers were *not* over whether the Law of God should be followed. Everyone agreed on that. Jesus and his disciples kept Jewish customs, observed Jewish festivals, and followed the Jewish Law. The disputes instead were over the proper interpretation of the Law. These were internal Jewish debates, no more harsh or vitriolic than those going on between other Jewish groups, for example, between the Essenes and the Pharisees.

Some of Jesus' disagreements with Pharisees involved moral decisions that a person had to make (many of which continue to be debated by religious persons today) based on some rather incomplete instructions given in the Law or involving matters not directly mentioned in the Law. As an example of the former: the Law made provision for a man divorcing his wife (cf. Deut. 24:1-4). Even among the Pharisees there were disputes concerning legitimate grounds for divorce; Jesus himself, taking a fairly radical stand, insisted that the legal grounds provided by Moses were simply a makeshift measure and that God preferred people never to divorce.⁶ As an example of the latter: Should one support a corrupt civil government? For Jesus, since the end of the present order was imminent, taxes were a matter of indifference: "Render unto Caesar

the things that belong to Caesar" (i.e., the money Caesar minted that bore his own impression; Mark 12:13-17; G.Thom. 100). Such principles were widely debated among different Jewish leaders.

More vitriolic were the disputes Jesus had with Pharisees over the proper interpretation of laws that both sides agreed were given by God and were to be followed. I won't give a complete inventory here, but briefly mention just two: the laws about Sabbath and tithing. Even today, readers of the New Testament, including some scholars committed to examining the question, often think that Jesus violated the Mosaic proscription of work on the Sabbath and urged his followers not to keep the Sabbath. It's true, of course, that his Pharisaic opponents *charged* Jesus with breaking Sabbath. But in fact it's difficult to find any place in the Gospel traditions where Jesus actually does anything in violation of the Sabbath laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. In nearly every instance that Pharisees accuse him of breaking Sabbath, Jesus has broken *their interpretation* of the Sabbath laws—for example, by healing on the Sabbath or allowing his disciples to pluck some grain to eat on the Sabbath. But healing on the Sabbath is nowhere forbidden in the Law itself, and Jesus himself is not said to have plucked grain on the Sabbath. For Jesus, there is in fact an overarching principle that determines what is appropriate to do on the Sabbath: "Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, the Sabbath is a great good—it's a much needed day to rest from other weekly activities. But it is not to pose an inordinate burden on anyone. And since the Law of God is meant to help, not hurt humans, then it is always right to do what helps, not what hurts, others on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4).

To some extent the Pharisees agreed with this judgment. We know, for example, that Pharisees judged that if a farmer had an animal that fell into a pit in the Sabbath, it was all right to pull it out (in contrast, the Essenes claimed that this ruling was far too lax, as known now from the Dead Sea Scrolls).⁷ Jesus himself alludes to the Pharisaic view in both Q (Luke 14:5; Matt. 12:11) and L (Luke 13:15), but takes it a step further: humans are worth more to God than animals, and so it's perfectly acceptable to do something that might benefit someone on the Sabbath. Moreover, it is multiply attested that Jesus cited biblical precedent for such views, pointing out that even in the Hebrew Bible God extends his approbation of certain activities on the Sabbath (Mark 2:25-26; John 7:22-23). And so, it would be a mistake to think that Jesus abrogated the laws about the Sabbath: he kept the Sabbath day himself and interpreted the laws about Sabbath in view of his overarching notion of what God ultimately wanted, which was for people to

live completely for the sake of others. Any interpretation of the Law that violated that principle was automatically ruled out of court. What put the Pharisees at odds with Jesus—just as it put them at odds with the Essenes and others—was how the Law was to be interpreted, not whether it should be kept.

Consider a second example, already mentioned in chapter 10: tithing. In Jesus' words on the Pharisaic practice of tithing he does not condemn the idea of giving 10 percent of all produce *purchased* as well as *grown* to God. He simply thinks that this policy—devised in order to guarantee that the Mosaic laws of tithing be applied to all produce that an upright person had to do with—is of less importance than what he calls “the weightier matters of the law.” Anyone insisting that what really mattered was the amount of mint and cummin God had been offered was completely missing the point. What God wanted was a people committed to loving him above all else and loving their neighbors as themselves (Q: Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

It may be that at times Jesus pushed his emphasis on love to such an extreme that it seemed to others that he discounted the Law. In some parts of the tradition, for example, he seems to spurn some of the laws of purity that are so central to the Hebrew Bible. At one point, for example, he denies the necessity of the Pharisaic practice of washing one's hands before a meal. This kind of ritual washing was done not to get rid of germs—these people didn't know about germs—but to become “ritually clean” before God. In our earliest tradition about the matter, though, Jesus says: “There is nothing outside a person that can bring defilement by entering into him; but it is the things that are outside of a person that bring defilement” (Mark 7:16). In Mark's account, Jesus is then said to explain:

Nothing that enters into a person from the outside can defile the person because it doesn't enter into his heart but into his stomach and then into the toilet.... It is what goes out from a person that defiles him, evil thoughts, sexual perversions, thefts, murders, adulteries, illicit longings, evil deeds, deceit, wild living, evil glances, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things proceed out of a person and bring defilement (Mark 7:19–23; cf. G.Thom. 14).

Some people—even those who passed along the traditions—understood Jesus to mean that it didn't matter what kind of food a person ate, so that, for example, there was no reason to keep the kosher food laws of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, this is the interpretation given by the author of Mark himself, who adds a parenthetical comment indicating

that Jesus, by saying this, “declared that all foods were clean” (Mark 7:19). This, though, would be an odd thing for a Jewish teacher to proclaim—that the Jewish Law is no longer valid. And there are reasons for thinking that this is simply the interpretation given later, *after* Jesus' day, especially to Gentiles in the Christian congregations. In context, Jesus himself is not abrogating the Mosaic food laws, but denying the need to wash hands before eating. Cleansing the outside (the hands) isn't really going to make clean the inside (the person). And what matters is what is within.

Thus, following narrow and clear-cut prescriptions about how to keep Sabbath, what to tithe, and how to eat is not really what matters before God. Anyone who keeps the Sabbath, tithes the produce, and washes the hands, but then commits murder or adultery, or deceives or slanders another, or exalts oneself over or oppresses others, has completely missed out on what God wants. The Pharisees, in other words, have emphasized the wrong things. In Jesus' words from Matthew, they “strain out the gnat but swallow the camel” (Matt. 23:24).

It's clear that harsh rhetoric between Jesus and the Pharisees cut both ways. That is to say, not only was Jesus the object of attack by Jewish teachers who objected to his interpretations; he himself also went on the attack. This is evidenced in multiple traditions scattered throughout all of our earliest sources, where Jesus calls some of his opponents “blind leaders of the blind” (Q: Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39; G.Thom. 34), insisting that they are intent simply to draw attention to themselves. And we know what Jesus thinks of those who exalt themselves (see Mark 12:38–40; Matt. 23:5; Luke 11:43; 20:45–47). Elsewhere he claims that they place people under heavy demands that they cannot (or at least do not) meet themselves (Q: Matt. 23:4; Luke 11:46). And he insists that their rules are in fact a hindrance to those who want to do God's will (Q: Matt. 23:13; Luke 11:52; G.Thom. 39, 102), warning that they will be subject to the wrath of God when the day of judgment arrives (Mark 12:40; Matt. 23:12, 33, 36).

I should reemphasize in conclusion that these heated disagreements with the Pharisees were not particularly out of place in Jesus' world of first-century Palestinian Judaism. There were lots of internal disputes among Jewish teachers—sometimes teachers within the same party (though these tended to be not quite so heated)—as Essenes vehemently disagreed with Sadducees and Pharisees, Sadducees with advocates of the violent “fourth philosophy” mentioned by Josephus, the prophetic followers of John the Baptist with the proponents of the status quo among the scribes, and so on. It was *not*, as is sometimes thought among Christian readers, a case of Jesus against everyone else.

There were lots of views that all contended with one another, each group insisting that it was right and that the others were, tragically, wrong.

Moreover, it was not these legal disputes with the Pharisees that ultimately led to Jesus' execution. As I mentioned at an earlier stage in chapter 7, the Pharisees were not the power players in Jesus' day. Though they may have been widely respected for their great piety (even this is somewhat hard to establish on the basis of the surviving evidence) they had no political clout, civil authority, or legislative jurisdiction. Their disputes with Jesus could not, in themselves, have led to his crucifixion, any more than your own local Baptist preacher's firm and outspoken disdain of the Jesuit priest across town can lead to his arrest and imprisonment today. It is striking that when Jesus went to Jerusalem, it was not the Pharisees who had him arrested and who bore witness against him at his trial. It was the Sadducees and chief priests. It was only when Jesus left the familiar rural environs of his childhood and took his apocalyptic message of the coming judgment of God to the capital city of Jerusalem that he aroused the opposition of those who were powerful enough to silence him. Once he offended them by proclaiming that they, too, would face God's coming wrath, his own days became numbered.

the last days of Jesus

TO UNDERSTAND THE DEATH OF SOCRATES, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT HE DRANK HEMLOCK IN HIS PRISON CELL WHILE TALKING TO A GROUP OF HIS ADMIRERS. YOU NEED TO KNOW something about the social and political situation in Athens and about Socrates' teachings—both those that his enemies found dangerous and those that enabled him to take his own life philosophically and cheerfully, with a clever witticism on his lips before breathing his last. To understand the death of Martin Luther King Jr., it's not enough to know that he was shot on the balcony of a motel in Memphis. You need to know something about the social and political turmoil in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement and about his message, which inspired his followers and terrified his enemies. To understand the death of Jesus, it's not enough to know that he was flogged and then crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. You need to know something about the social and political world of first-century Palestine and about the message that he delivered, a message that brought hope of deliverance to the powerless but a fear of uprising to the powerful.

It is not that the people in power actually feared that Jesus' words would come true. They were by no means quaking in their sandals at the thought that the Son of Man might arrive soon and destroy their government, their institutions, their base of power, and their very lives. But they did know what rabble-rousers like Jesus could do to a crowd,