

The Gospel of Peter as a Jewish Christian Document

JOEL MARCUS

Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC 27708, USA. Email: jmarcus@div.duke.edu

The second half of the Akhmîm fragment of the Gospel of Peter distinguishes the recalcitrant Jewish leaders, who suppress the truth of Jesus' resurrection, from the Jewish people, who regret their murder of Jesus the moment he dies – a distinction best explained by the thesis that the document was produced by and for Jewish Christians living in second-century Syria. Other Christian documents related to the Gospel of Peter and written or influenced by second- and third-century Jewish Christians, especially the Didascalia Apostolorum, show a similar combination of philo- and anti-Judaism. The Gospel's reference to the disciples fasting during the interim between Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection may refer to the practice, attested in the Didascalia and elsewhere, of liturgical fasting for the Jews. Apocalypse of Peter 2, which was probably an original part of the Gospel, holds out hope for Israel's restoration. As the Akhmîm scribe excised this hopeful chapter from the Apocalypse, so he probably excised the hopeful ending of the Gospel, in which the risen Jesus commissioned the disciples to continue the work of separating the people from their recalcitrant leaders and thereby converting them to faith in the one they had crucified.

Keywords: Gospel of Peter, Apocalypse of Peter, Didascalia Apostolorum, anti-Judaism, Jewish Christianity, Syria, Quartodecimanism

The anti-Jewish tendency of the Gospel of Peter (hereafter abbreviated as GP) is well known.¹ The extant fragment begins with the report that none of the Jews, 'neither Herod nor one of his judges', washed his hands. By contrast the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, does wash his hands, thus symbolically absolving himself of blood-guilt for Jesus' death (cf. 11.46). This guilt accrues instead to the Jewish 'king', Herod, his 'judges' and his nation. Pilate and the Romans, then, are

¹ For the points in this and the following paragraph, see T. Nicklas, 'Die "Juden" im Petrus-evangelium (PCair 10759): Ein Testfall', *NTS* 47 (2001) 206–21 and P. Augustin, *Die Juden im Petrus-evangelium* (BZNW 214; Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015). Unless otherwise specified, translations of the Gospel of Peter are from R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1994) II.1318–21.

exculpated, whereas Herod and the Jews are vilified. Pilate does not even condemn Jesus formally to death, as in the canonical Gospels; that role is fulfilled by Herod (1.2), who then hands Jesus over to ‘the people’, that is, the Jewish populace of Jerusalem – not to the Romans, as in the canonical Gospels. ‘The people’ then drag Jesus to the place of execution, mock his royal pretensions, torment him in various ways and finally crucify him, casting lots for his garments (2.5-4.12) – here again playing the callous and sadistic role the canonical Gospels ascribe to the Romans.

Elsewhere the Gospel of Peter alternates between subtle and open critique of the Jews. Subtle critique is expressed by the motif of the darkness that covers the land as Jesus hangs on the cross. While this feature is found in the Synoptics (Mark 15.33 pars.), the Gospel of Peter connects it thematically with the Jews (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) by specifying that the darkness ‘held fast all *Judea*’ (τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, 5.15). The Gospel of Peter also enhances the canonical Gospels’ account of the tormenting drink offered to the crucified Jesus by Jewish bystanders (5.16):² only in the Gospel of Peter is this drink followed by the editorial comment, ‘And they fulfilled and completed the sins on their own head’ (5.17). The negative characterisation continues in the Empty Tomb narrative, where, echoing the Gospel of John (7.13; 19.38; 20.19), Mary Magdalene and her companions are reluctant to go to the tomb openly because of their fear of ‘the Jews’ (12.50, 52).

According to Tobias Nicklas, these features obstruct identification with the Jewish characters in the story; the Gospel of Peter, therefore, was probably not intended to inspire Jews to repent and convert to Christianity.³ Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, similarly, assert that the anti-Judaism of the Gospel of Peter ‘reflète une situation de polémique tendue entre chrétiens et Juifs, dont le présupposé est une prise de conscience claire de leur séparation et de leur opposition réciproques’.⁴

This is a strong case, but I demur from it. As Nicklas himself recognises, ‘the Jews’ are not a univocally anti-Christian group throughout the Gospel of Peter.⁵ After Jesus’ death, the leaders remain bitterly opposed to him and seek to

2 On the dependence of Gospel of Peter on the canonical Gospels, see R. E. Brown, ‘The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority’, *NTS* 33 (1987) 321–43; A. Kirk, ‘Examining Priorities: Another Look at the *Gospel of Peter’s* Relationship to the New Testament Gospels’, *NTS* 40 (1994) 572–95; P. Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 4; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010) 119–47; T. P. Henderson, *The Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics: Rewriting the Story of Jesus’ Death, Burial, and Resurrection* (WUNT 2.301; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 32–43; and Augustin, *Juden*, 57–97.

3 See Nicklas, ‘*Juden*’, 220 n. 57.

4 C. Moreschini and E. Norelli, *Histoire de la littérature chrétienne ancienne grecque et latine*, vol. 1: *De Paul à l’ère de Constantin* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000) 101; similarly Augustin, *Juden*, 412–15.

5 Nicklas, ‘*Juden*’, 219–21.

thwart proclamation of his resurrection (which they have observed!), but the people repent of their role in his crucifixion and become a sympathetic collective character. This division, in my opinion, mirrors the author's perception of contemporary reality and hope for the future: the Jewish leaders in his environment are hostile to the messianic movement, but the people are sympathetic, and the author hopes they will end up becoming Christian.

This reading is in line with the view, which has been put forward from time to time since Jürgen Denker's 1975 dissertation, that the Gospel of Peter was composed for a Jewish Christian audience.⁶ This modern view is supported by the ancient testimony of Theodoret of Antioch, the fifth-century bishop of the Syrian city of Cyrrhus, who says that members of the Jewish Christian sect of the Nazarenes 'honor Christ as a righteous man and use the Gospel according to Peter'.⁷

Such a Jewish Christian setting would account both for the Gospel's pro-Jewish aspects (which reflect the author's ties of sympathy with and hope for his ancestral people) and for its anti-Jewish aspects (which reflect the opposition of the Jewish leadership in his area to Christian claims). As Alan Kirk puts it, the Gospel 'rationalizes the limited Jewish response to the Christian proclamation ("their leaders keep them in ignorance of the truth of the resurrection") while at the same time [it] makes a case to Jews as to why they should leave the synagogue and join the church ("your leaders are untrustworthy and are deceiving you")'.⁸ I intend to anchor this insight in a concrete reconstruction of the Gospel's context.

1. The Narrative Dynamics of the Picture of the Jews in the Gospel of Peter

In my opinion, the scholar who has analysed the ambiguity of GP's picture of the Jews most searchingly is John Dominic Crossan, who emphasises the sharp

6 See J. Denker, *Die theologieggeschichtliche Stellung des Petrus-evangeliums: Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte des Dokerismus* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23.23.36; Bern/Frankfurt: Herbert Lang/Peter Lang, 1975), 78–92, arguing for a Jewish Christian provenance on the basis of the use of the Old Testament in GP. Others who have advocated a Jewish Christian provenance include R. R. Hann, 'Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in The First Century', *JRH* 14 (1987) 340–60, at 357; Moreschini and Norelli, *Histoire*, 102; S. C. Mimouni, *Les fragments évangéliques judéo-chrétiens 'apocryphés': recherches et perspectives* (CahRB 66; Paris: Gabalda, 2006) 65; and P. van Minnen, 'The Akhmîm Gospel of Peter', *Das Evangelium nach Petrus: Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (ed. T. J. Kraus and T. Nicklas; TU 158; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2007) 53–60, at 59. None gives detailed argumentation.

7 Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 112–13 gives the passage in Greek and English and a short discussion. Although Jesus is not merely a righteous man in the Gospel of Peter, the term δίκαιος does appear in the important passage 7.28; cf. δίκαιός in 2.7.

8 Kirk, 'Examining Priorities', 321.

division between the depiction of Jewish characters in the first and second halves of the preserved fragment.⁹ In the first half, the people and its leaders are united in their opposition to Jesus. It may be Herod's 'judges' who join him in refusing to wash their hands of Jesus' blood (1.1), but it is 'the people' (ὁ λαός) to whom he delivers Jesus (2.5). The latter mock Jesus as the 'King of Israel' and 'Son of God', push him, strip him of his garments, spit and jab at him, slap him (3.6-9), and finally crucify him (4.10), thus 'fulfill[ing] all things and complet[ing] the sins on their head' (5.17).

But a change in the people's attitude immediately occurs. The turning point comes with their observation of the great signs that accompany Jesus' death: the darkness at noon (μεσημβρία) over Judea (5.15), the splitting of the Temple curtain (5.20), the earthquake when Jesus' body is laid out (6.21) and the return of the sun after the darkness (6.22). All of these seem to be in view in 8.28, where the people – here even joined by the leaders – beat their breasts and say that these prodigies show that Jesus was supremely righteous.¹⁰ This link between darkness and mourning has an Old Testament intertext, Amos 8.9–10, in which 'that day' of the Lord's judgement (cf. GP 7.25: 'The judgment has approached') includes darkness at noon (μεσημβρία) and sudden mourning as for a deceased son. This intertext, if deliberately invoked here, itself points towards the possibility of a changed attitude, because the son in the LXX is described as 'beloved' (ἀγαπητός).¹¹ Verse 7.25, which begins with a disjunctive τότε ('then'), might at first suggest that the result is general repentance, including both leaders and people, but this hope is dashed in 8.29, where we are told that the leaders fear the people's repentant reaction to the signs.

From this point on, a division between the leaders and the people begins to emerge. In 8.30, the leaders express their anxiety that, if Jesus' body is stolen, the people may 'accept that he is risen from the dead, and do us wrong'. They therefore persuade Pilate to appoint a guard to secure the tomb, and the elders and scribes accompany the guard to the burial place to make sure the job is done right (8.31–2). These hostile witnesses are distinguished from the sympathetic crowd that comes from Jerusalem on Saturday morning to see the sealed tomb (9.34). The elders (but apparently not the sympathetic crowd) are still present on Saturday night when Jesus is resurrected, an event they witness (11.45–57). They react to this greatest of miracles, however, not with faith and conversion but with heightened fear that the people may turn against them. This leads to their conspiracy to suppress the truth of the resurrection, 'for ... it is better for us to owe the debt of the greatest

9 J. D. Crossan, 'The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels', *Das Evangelium nach Petrus*, 117–34, at 124–8; cf. Nicklas, 'Juden', 21.

10 See Augustin, *Juden*, 205–6.

11 See Nicklas, 'Juden', 219. Another possible OT intertext is Zech 12.10–11, which speaks of the people looking on the one they have pierced and mourning over him as over an only son. This also suggests sympathy for the 'son'.

sin in the sight of God than to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews (τοῦ λαοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων) and be stoned' (11.48, trans. Brown alt.).

Crossan comments on this locution:

That is a strange phrase, 'the people of the Jews'. For this author there are two Jewish groups: first, the authorities, including several groups, also called simply 'the Jews'; and 'the people' or 'the people of the Jews'.¹²

Indeed, the referent of the term 'the Jews' fluctuates oddly throughout the document. At the very beginning (1.1) and near the end (12.50, 52) it refers to the hostile leaders, but by 2.5 the people have become associated with the leaders' hostility, so that, when we read in 6.23 that 'the Jews rejoiced' that the sun had returned, and that they turned Jesus' corpse over to Joseph, we are probably meant to understand the term to include both leaders and people. But two verses later, in 7.25, 'the Jews' seem to be *distinguished from* the elders and priests, and therefore to denote the sympathetic populace. This could also be the meaning in 11.48, where the leaders fear falling into the hands of 'the people of the Jews' (ἐμπροσθεν εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ λαοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων), taking τῶν Ἰουδαίων as an exegetical genitive: the common people are the true Jewish nation. It is perhaps more likely, however, that the genitive is partitive, denoting the non-elite part of the nation. In any case, 'the Jews' in the Gospel of Peter are sometimes the leaders, sometimes the people, and sometimes both combined, and while the term is usually hostile, it is not always so. This fluidity in denotation perhaps suggests a fluidity in conception: it is not clear in the author's environment who speaks for 'the Jews', the hostile leaders or the sympathetic people.

The death of Jesus, then, marks a caesura in the narrative, and the leaders and people respond to this event in increasingly divergent ways – the people with repentance, the leaders with conspiratorial deceit. This split leads to tension between the two groups – the people murmuring against the leaders, the leaders fearing the people (8.28–30) – fearing especially that, if the secret of Jesus' divine sonship were to leak out, the people would turn against them (11.48).

What did this split lead to in the lost end of the narrative, and what are the implications of that for the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel? Nicklas cautiously suggests that the people's retrospective sorrow at their murder of Jesus might leave the door open for future repentance, but he finally decides this is unlikely because of the negative characterisation of the Ἰουδαῖοι.¹³ As we have just seen, however, the image of the Ἰουδαῖοι in the work is inconsistent, and not always negative, and the author's wrath is directed primarily at the leaders rather than the people.

¹² Crossan, *Gospel of Peter*, 126.

¹³ Nicklas, 'Juden', 220 and n. 57.

Crossan is more attuned to the shifting narrative dynamics of the Jewish characters, laying great stress on the positive portrayal of the people in the second half of the fragment. Arguing against Raymond Brown, who characterises the Gospel of Peter as more anti-Jewish than any canonical Gospel, Crossan points out that this is true only of the first half of the fragment. In the second half, however,

the Jewish authorities are supremely guilty – much more so than in any canonical account – because they have actually witnessed the resurrection itself; but ... the ‘people of the Jews’ are so repentant that their own leaders dare not tell them the truth of the resurrection which they themselves have just seen ... If only, as it were, the Jewish people had been told the truth by the Jewish authorities, they would all have become Christian! That, of course, is simply a dream, but it is one from earlier rather than later in the night of Jewish and Christian relations.¹⁴

Crossan, then, sees the GP portrait of ‘first the responsibility, then the repentance, but finally the inculpable ignorance of “the people of the Jews”¹⁵ as a sign that the Gospel of Peter – or, rather, its putative source, the Cross Gospel¹⁶ – comes from an earlier epoch than the canonical Gospels.

Crossan’s formulation, ‘first responsibility, then repentance, then inculpable ignorance’, is an important insight into the narrative dynamics of the story. However, his argument that this sort of portrayal could only have occurred at a very early stage of Christian history seems to assume that, after that earliest period, a vibrant Jewish Christianity hopeful of winning the battle for Jewish hearts and minds no longer existed. But this is to buy into Adolf Harnack’s tendentious opinion that an anti-Jewish Gentile Christianity quickly (and, in Harnack’s view, fittingly) eclipsed Jewish Christianity and Judaism in general.¹⁷ I hope to show, rather, that the Gospel of Peter fits well into a context where that generalisation did *not* apply, namely, second-century Syria.

Syria in the second century and third centuries was a place where Jewish Christians were still very much a factor to be reckoned with and still cherished a lively hope for the conversion of their fellow Jews. The author of the Gospel of Peter, I will argue, shared that hope.

2. The Setting of the Gospel of Peter

The basic textual witness for the Gospel of Peter is P.Cair. 10759, which was discovered by French archaeologists excavating the ancient city of Akhmîm in

¹⁴ Crossan, ‘*Gospel of Peter*’, 132–3.

¹⁵ Crossan, ‘*Gospel of Peter*’, 133.

¹⁶ For objections to Crossan’s ‘Cross Gospel’ theory, see the literature listed above, n. 2.

¹⁷ A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (1905; repr. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961) 44–72.

Upper Egypt in 1886–7. The beginning and end (and therefore the title) of this Greek parchment fragment, which is probably to be dated to the late sixth century, are missing. What is left is narrated in the first person by Peter and describes the trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, breaking off at the beginning of a resurrection appearance on the Sea of Galilee to the implied author, his brother Andrew and Levi son of Alphaeus.¹⁸

Despite the late Egyptian provenance of this manuscript, the consensus of scholarship is that the original text comes from mid second-century Syria.¹⁹ This localisation depends partly on the reference in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (6.12.2–6) to a work by Serapion, the bishop of Syrian Antioch at the end of the second century, entitled *Concerning the So-Called Gospel of Peter*.²⁰ Serapion recounts that he first allowed 'the Gospel put forward ... in the name of Peter' to be read by the Christian community in the Syrian city of Rhossus, but later came to reject it because it was being used by the disciples of a certain Marcianus to support their docetism. The Akhmîm fragment is probably not docetic,²¹ but it is easy to see how some of its passages (for example, 4.10 and 5.19) might be taken as such. Serapion's report about the Gospel of Peter, therefore, establishes a plausible link between the Akhmîm fragment and a late second-century Syrian figure, and it thus makes a mid second-century Syrian setting for the text plausible. Also supporting a mid second-century dating (though not a Syrian setting) are the parallels between GP 2.3–5a and P.Oxy. 2949, which has been dated on palaeographical grounds to the late second or early third century.²²

Links with other texts written in Syriac or that can plausibly be connected with Christians in the Roman province of Syria also help establish an early Syrian provenance for the Gospel of Peter. The most prominent of these is the Didascalia

18 See Van Minnen, 'Akhmîm *Gospel of Peter*'; Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 1–7, 43–57.

19 An exception is O. Perler, 'L'Évangile de Pierre et Méliton de Sardes', *RB* 71 (1964) 584–90, who concludes from the linkages with the Peri Pascha of Melito of Sardis that the author is a native of Asia Minor; for further parallels, see F. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013) 380–4. Some of these linkages, however, are probably due to a common Quartodeciman background; cf. A. Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (VC Supplement 42; Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 1998) 26; on the Gospel of Peter and Quartodecimanism, see below, pp. 488–90. Moreover, as Francis Watson, the editor of this journal, has pointed out to me, even if we posit a literary relationship between Melito and the Gospel of Peter, that does not necessitate an Asian provenance for the latter, since the document may have travelled quickly to Asia, as it eventually did to Egypt. On the linkage between Quartodeciman circles in Asia Minor and Syria, including translations of Melito into Syriac, see Stewart-Sykes, *Feast*, 27–9.

20 For other patristic references, see Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 97–115.

21 J. W. McCant, 'The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered', *NTS* 30 (1984) 258–73.

22 See Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 58–68.

Apostolorum (hereafter abbreviated as DA), an early third-century Syrian text originally composed in Greek, of which fragments exist, but which is fully preserved only in a Syriac translation of the mid-fourth to early-sixth century. The author himself appears to be a Christian of Jewish birth (see especially DA 19.5.5.3/172.11-14/190.14-18 and 26.6.17.16/230.11-14/248.6-8),²³ although he strenuously opposes the attraction of some in his community to the ‘Second Legislation’, the ritual Law supposedly imposed on the Jews to punish them for the sin of the Golden Calf. Despite his antagonism to the ritual Law, the author’s Jewish background comes to the fore in the glowing terms in which he elsewhere speaks of ‘the Law’ and in his positive uses of the term ‘the people’ for the Jews.²⁴

Already near the close of the nineteenth century Harnack registered a striking correspondence between this work and the Gospel of Peter: in both Pilate’s hand-washing is contrasted with Herod’s condemnation of Jesus to death (GP 1.1-2; DA 21.5.19.4-5/199.16-21/214.23-215.4). The latter feature occurs in none of the canonical Gospels; indeed, at the only point in the canonical passion narratives where Herod appears (Luke 23.6-15), he ends up declaring Jesus innocent. Harnack concluded, mostly on the basis of this overlap, that ‘das Didascalia-Evangelium das Petrus ev. ist’.²⁵

Since Harnack, scholars have discerned further links between the Gospel of Peter and the Didascalia, for example, the overlap between GP 9.35-42; 11.45 (Jesus’ resurrection on Saturday night) and DA 21.5.14.14/190.19-191.2/207.20-1,²⁶ as well as between GP 14.60 (the apparent post-resurrectional appearance of Jesus to

23 In Didascalia references, the first set of numbers in parentheses is the traditional chapter number followed by the division into book, chapter and paragraph devised by F. X. Funk and used in A. Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version with Introduction and Annotation* (Studia Traditionis Theologiae: Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 2009). The second set of numbers designates the English translation in A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 175-6, 179-80; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979), by page and line number; the third set designates the Syriac text in the same. I have used Vööbus’ English translation by default because it is more literal than Stewart-Sykes’ (cf. Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia*, 89).

24 On the dating, provenance and Jewish Christian background of the Didascalia, see J. Marcus, ‘The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Common Jewish-Christian Milieu?’, *JTS* 61 (2010) 596-626, at 600-2, 606-9, 616-23.

25 A. Harnack, *Bruchstücke des Evangeliums und der Apokalypse des Petrus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1893²) 41-2.

26 Cf. DA 21.5.18-5.19.1/199.22-7/215.5-9, which has the church’s Easter vigil ending three hours after (the end of) the Sabbath, and Anaphora Pilati B 8 (Tischendorf, p. 487): μήτ᾽ δὲ τῶν σαββάτων περὶ τὴν τρίτην ὥραν τῆς νυκτός. L. Vaganay, *L’Évangile de Pierre* (EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1930) 292 comments: ‘En effet, les auteurs qui dépendent plus ou moins directement du pseudo-Pierre [sc. Didascalia, Anaphora Pilati, Aphrahat, Demonstrations 12.6] font, eux aussi, de la résurrection un miracle nocturne et le placent même vers neuf heures du soir.’

Levi) and DA 21.5.14.14/191.2-4/207.21-2.²⁷ More significantly for our purposes, both documents imply that Peter and the other disciples fasted and mourned for Jesus in the terrible hours between his passion and his resurrection (GP 7.26-7; DA 21.5.13/188.20-1/206.3-5; 21.5.19.2/199.8-9/214.16-17).²⁸ The motif of the disciples' sadness during and after Jesus' passion is found occasionally in the canonical Gospels (Mark 14.72 pars.; Luke 24.17; cf. Mark 16.10), but it is never connected with fasting, as it is in both the Gospel of Peter and the Didascalia.²⁹

There are also links between the Gospel of Peter and a Jewish Christian source of the Pseudoclementine Recognitions that most scholars trace back to second- or third-century Syria (Rec 1.27-71 or 1.33-71). The source was originally in Greek, which has been lost except for small fragments. Most of the narrative, including our passage, is available only in translations made in the fourth and fifth centuries into Syriac and Latin respectively.³⁰ Most of the parallels to the Gospel of Peter are found in the Syriac version of Rec 1.41.1-4, and they include the disturbance of the people at the sun going dark and the tearing of the Temple veil (GP 5.15; 7.25; 8.28), and the split between the people and their leaders (GP 7.28-31; 11.43-8). Furthermore, as Robert Van Voorst has noted, in both the Gospel of Peter (8.28-30) and Rec 1.41.4, the effect of the portents on the common people continues after Jesus' death, leading to a change of heart – a feature, again, not present in the canonical Gospels.³¹ The next section of the Recognitions (1.42.3), as well as GP 6.22, moreover, inform us that the sun reappeared after the supernatural darkness that foreshadowed, so to speak, Jesus' death. Jones concedes that '[t]his ... is a natural thing for the sun to do' but rightly emphasises that only the Gospel of Peter, the Recognitions and Ephrem, who seems to be dependent on the Recognitions, mention it.³²

Both the second/third-century Syrian Jewish Christian source found in the Pseudoclementine Recognitions, then, and the third-century Syrian Jewish Christian work, the Didascalia, have significant overlaps with the Gospel of Peter, and it seems probable that both used the Gospel of Peter as a source.

27 See R. H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929) lxxv-lxxvi.

28 On this link, see Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia*, 213 n. 11.

29 For other canonical and non-canonical parallels to the motif of the disciples' post-crucifixion mourning, see J. A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 186-7. None mentions fasting.

30 See F. S. Jones, 'The Gospel of Peter in Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1,27-71', *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies* (2007; repr. OLA 203; Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012) 283-90.

31 R. E. Van Voorst, *The Ascents of James: History and Theology of a Jewish-Christian Community* (SBLDS 112; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 107 n. 36.

32 Jones, 'Gospel of Peter', 284-5; cf. Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 21.5 (on Luke 23.45).

3. The Judgement of Jerusalem

These are mostly thematic overlaps, but one important set of vocabulary parallels ties the Gospel of Peter to Recognitions 1.41, the Didascalia, and other early Christian literature, almost all of it from Syria, which is either Jewish Christian in origin or strongly influenced by Jewish Christianity. This is the reference in GP 7.25 to the people of Jerusalem bemoaning their sin of killing Jesus, which will lead to the destruction of their city. The most striking parallels³³ may be seen in the following display of texts and the accompanying Table 1.

Gospel of Peter 7.25

τότε οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς, γνόντες οἷον κακὸν ἑαυτοῖς ἐποίησαν, ἤρξαντο κόπτεσθαι καὶ λέγειν. “Οὐαὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν· ἤγγισεν ἡ κρίσις καὶ τὸ τέλος Ἰερουσαλήμ.”

Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, having come to know how much wrong they had done themselves, began to beat themselves and say, ‘**Woe to our sins. The judgment has approached and the end of Jerusalem.**’

Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 20.28³⁴

Վայ էր, վայ էր վեգ....Որդի էր սա աստուծոյ....Եկեալ հասեալ են,...աւասիկ դատաստանք աւերածոյն Երուսաղէմի:

Woe was it, woe was it to us ... This was the son of God ...They have come, they have arrived ... Behold, **the judgments of the desolation of Jerusalem!**

Pseudoclementine Recognitions 1.41.3 Syriac

ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܫܘܒܐܢܐ ܕܥܢ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ
ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ

And the curtain of the Temple was split, for it was **wailing** as if in **mourning** over **the future destruction of the place.**³⁵

33 For others, see Rendel Harris, ‘The Origin of a Famous Lucan Gloss’, *ExpT* 35 (1923–24) 7–10; Vaganay, *Évangile*, 268–71; and William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (VC Supplement 25; Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 1994), 414–20. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are mine.

34 From L. Leloir, *Saint Éphrem. Commentaire de l’Évangile concordant. Version arménienne* (CSCO 137, 145. *Scriptores Armeniaci* 1–II; Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1953) 1.300, II.215.

35 From W. Frankenberg, *Die syrischen Clementinen mit griechischem Paralleltex* (TU 4.3.3./48.3; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1937) 48. The Latin is similar: *velum templi scissum est, velut lamentans excidium imminens loco.*

Table 1. Jewish Mourning over the Coming Judgement of Jerusalem and the Temple in Ancient Christian Literature.

Gospel of Peter 7.25	Ephrem, <i>Comm. on Diatessaron</i> 20.28 (Armenian)	Pseudoclementine Recognitions 1.41.3	Didascalia Apostolorum 21	Teaching of Addai f. 18a	Luke 23.48, MS G (Codex Sangermanensis)
(3.9: with such honour let us honour the Son of God)	(this was the Son of God ...)			unless they had known that he was the Son of God	
woe	woe was it, woe was it to us ...	the curtain of the temple was split as if in mourning	(we are required ... to mourn)	(they would not have laid sorrows upon themselves)	woe to us for the things that have happened today
to our sins					on account of our sins
	they have arrived...				
the judgement	the judgements		for the judgement		
has approached					
and the end of Jerusalem	of the desolation of Jerusalem	over the future destruction of the place	and the destruction of the place	the ones who crucified him would not have proclaimed the desolation of their city	for the desolation of Jerusalem
(has approached)	(have arrived)				has come near
			we are required ... to mourn	also, they would not have laid sorrows upon themselves	

(Codex Sangermanensis,³⁶ the Teaching of Addai³⁷ and the Diatessaron³⁸), and since all except Codex Sangermanensis come from Syria,³⁹ they strengthen the case that the Gospel of Peter proceeds from a Syrian ambience strongly influenced by Jewish Christianity. It is particularly striking that the Gospel of Peter's closest parallel is with the Diatessaron, which was probably composed in Syria in the third quarter of the second century, and seems to be in touch with Jewish Christian Gospels. Between the two of them the Gospel of Peter's version seems to be earlier, since it has a single woe as opposed to two and an anomalous singular verb as opposed to the Diatessaron's smoother plural.⁴⁰

4. Redemptive Mourning at Jesus' Death and Fasting for the Jews

Of course, saying that the Gospel of Peter comes out of an ambience influenced by early Syrian Jewish Christianity is not identical with saying that the work itself is Jewish Christian or sympathetic to Jews; Ephrem and Aphrahat provide excellent counter-examples.⁴¹ So we must delve further into the Gospel's picture of the Jews mourning, beating their breasts, bewailing the wrong they have done and proclaiming Jesus' innocence in the moments immediately following his death (7.25–8.28). Do these actions represent the hopeless regret of those who have waited too long to repent, and know they can only anticipate merciless judgement (cf. Matt 24.30; Heb 12.16–17; Rev 1.7)? Or are they the productive sorrow of those who intuit that their great sins may yet become the arena for God to display the overwhelming power of his forgiveness (cf. 1 Kings 21.27–9; Hos 5.15–6.1; 14.1–8; Jonah 3.5–10; 1 Tim 1.15–16)?⁴² Is the scene, in other

36 On Codex Sangermanensis' Jewish Christian affiliation, see Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 414–20.

37 On the influence of Jewish Christianity on the Teaching of Addai, see B. ter Haar Romeny, 'Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 CE', *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (ed. Huub van de Sandt; Assen: Van Gorcum/Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 13–33, at 23–5.

38 On the influence of Jewish Christianity on the Diatessaron, see Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, Index Rerum under 'Judaic-Christianity' and 'Judaic-Christian gospels'.

39 The Teaching of Addai is a late fourth- or early fifth-century Syrian work; see S. H. Griffith, 'The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century', *Hugoye* 6 (2009) 269–292, at 269, 281, 289.

40 Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 426–7 dates the Diatessaron between 165 and 180, most likely between 172 and 175.

41 On Ephrem's anti-Judaism, see C. C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Patristic Monograph Series 20; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); on Aphrahat's, see J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (SFSHJ 205; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999).

42 On these two sorts of mourning for Jesus in early Christian literature, see G. Stählin, 'κόπτος, κόπτω', *TDNT* (1938; repr. 1965) III.847–52.

words, expressive of Jewish self-damnation or Jewish conversion? Philip Augustin, in his monograph on the Jews in the Gospel of Peter, argues that the former is the case: the repentance of the Jews has come too late, since they have already ‘completed the sins on their own head’ (GP 5.17) by crucifying, mocking and killing Jesus.⁴³

I argue, to the contrary, that, for the author of the Gospel of Peter, the people’s repentance is not ‘too little, too late’. They have committed a great sin in killing Jesus, and for this they will suffer the judgement of their capital’s destruction, as they themselves recognise (7.25). But the doors of repentance remain open to them, and their self-accusation marks the beginning of their entrance. This reading of GP 7.25 resembles the description given of the Jewish Christian Gospel of the Nazarenes by the ninth-century monk Haimo of Auxerre, who says that it portrays myriads of Jews converting to belief in Jesus at the time of his crucifixion.⁴⁴ It is instructive to recall that Theodoret of Cyrrihus says that the Nazarenes use the Gospel of Peter (above, p. 475).

This penitential interpretation of GP 7.25 gains credence from the fact that it and the reference to the Jews bemoaning Jesus’ death in 8.28 frame the reference in 7.26–7 to the disciples mourning and fasting between Good Friday and Jesus’ resurrection on Saturday night. As we have seen above, this unusual reference to apostolic fasting is a link with Didascalia 21, which describes the disciples fasting ‘when our Saviour suffered’ (5.13/188.20–1/206.3–5) or ‘when our Lord suffered, for a testimony of the three days’ (5.19.2/199.8–9/214.16–17) – that is, during the period that began with Jesus’ passion and ended with his night-time resurrection.

In the Didascalia, then, an apostolic fast on Good Friday and Holy Saturday grounds the church’s practice of fasting during that period, and several scholars have argued that the apostolic fast in the Gospel of Peter reflects a similar liturgical practice.⁴⁵ As Clemens Leonhard puts it, ‘Such an addition – or even contradiction – to the narrative of the Bible should serve some polemic end – for example to support a Christian festival of Unleavened Bread by giving it an apostolic pedigree.’⁴⁶ The Didascalia refers to this sort of paschal fasting six times⁴⁷ and portrays it as intended not only to commemorate Jesus’ suffering but also to give a spiritual boost to the church’s intercession for the Jews, who fell into the gravest of sins when they

43 Augustin, *Juden*, 280.

44 Haimo of Auxerre, *Commentary on Isaiah* (PL 116.994; on Isa 53.12); cf. Vaganay, *Évangile*, 268, who however contrasts Haimo’s testimony with GP 7.5: ‘Pierre ne dit pas que les Juifs ont embrassé la vraie foi.’

45 For example, Vaganay, *Évangile*, 273–5; Stewart-Sykes, *Feast*, 26.

46 C. Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in Current Research* (SJ 35; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2006) 225.

47 21.5.13/188.20–1/206.3–5; 5.14.15/191.4–6/207.22–6; 21.5.14.18–21/191.20–192.7/208.14–26; 21.5.14.22–5.15.1/192.8–193.11/208.27–209.27; 21.5.18–5.19.3/198.19–199.15/214.5–22; 21.5.20.9/201.17–20/217.16–19.

crucified Jesus during the paschal season but can still be redeemed. In one passage, for example, the author, speaking in the person of the apostles, exhorts his audience to fast on Good Friday and Holy Saturday and then recounts:

Indeed, in this way did we also fast, when our Lord suffered, for a testimony of the three days. And we were keeping vigil and praying and interceding for [that is, to avert] the loss of the people (ܩܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܡܢܐ ܕܥܪܘܘܢܐ ܕܥܡܢܐ ܕܥܪܘܘܢܐ), because they went astray and did not confess our Savior. Thus do you also pray that the Lord may not remember their guilt against them unto the end because of the perfidy which they treacherously brought against our Lord, but might grant them a place for repentance and conversion, and forgiveness of their wickedness. (DA 21.5.18.2–5.19.3/198.19–199.15/214.16–22, trans. Vööbus, alt.)

Here the Jews' 'perfidy which they treacherously brought against our Lord' – a statement that would be very much at home in the Gospel of Peter – is not forgotten. But instead of being the cause of their eternal loss and damnation, as usually happens in *Adversus Iudaeos* literature,⁴⁸ here it becomes a spur to fasting and prayer that God 'might grant them a place for repentance and conversion'.

This intercession scenario is even more dramatically expressed in another Didascalia passage that speaks of fasting, mourning and praying for the Jews:

On this account know, our [Christian] brothers, that our fast which we fast in the pascha, that you are to fast, is because our [Jewish] brothers have not obeyed. Indeed, even though they hate you, yet ought we to call them brothers, because it is written for us in Isaiah thus: 'Call them brothers, those who hate and reject you, that the name of the Lord may be glorified' [Isa 66.5]. On account of them, thus, and for the judgement and destruction of the place, we are required to fast and mourn, that we may rejoice and be glad in the world to come ... It is required of us thus to have pity on them, and to believe and to fast and pray for them. (DA 21.5.14.23–15.1/192.21–193.11/209.13–27 trans. Vööbus, alt.)

This passage is related to the Gospel of Peter not only by the motif of paschal fasting but also, as we have seen, by the notice that this fasting is a sign of mourning 'for the judgement and destruction of the place'. Jerusalem and its Temple, then, will be destroyed; their fate was sealed by the Jews' murder of Jesus.⁴⁹ But that is not the author's last word. Rather, the grievous woes that

48 See M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135–425* (1964; repr. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; London: Valentine Mitchell & Co., 1996) 208–9, 219; M. S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (StPB 46; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 42.

49 It should go without saying that, when I refer here and elsewhere to 'the Jews' murder of Jesus', etc., I am summarising the views articulated in ancient Christian texts, not my own historical or theological opinions.

the Jews consequently suffered are meant to inspire the audience 'to have pity on them, and to believe and to fast and to pray for them' (ܐܢܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ). The belief spoken of here is surely the belief that the Jews can still be saved.

In fact, they not only *can* be saved – they *will* be saved. For the author believes that the paschal fast observed in his community will have the desired effect, despite the fact that up to this point 'our brothers', who 'hate and reject' the Christians, 'have not obeyed' the glorious message of the gospel. In spite of that, they remain 'our brothers' (ܐܘܝܬܝܢ), a term that the Jewish Christian author uses in the same sentence for his fellow Christians. The two sets of brothers remain mysteriously intertwined, despite the enmity that the Jewish 'brothers' presently manifest for the Christian ones. No matter, because God's commitment to Jewish salvation will trump the present Jewish rejection of the gospel message and the Christians. In the view of the author of the Didascalia, then, hatred and rejection will not be the Jews' final response to the offer of the gospel. If his Christian brothers will fast and pray for their Jewish brothers – as the apostles themselves did – believing that those brothers will come around, they *will* come around, becoming brothers not just in flesh but also in Spirit.

A similar practice of liturgical fasting for the Jews is attested in other Syrian texts from the early Christian centuries; these texts, like the Gospel of Peter, all seem to be related to the Didascalia in one way or another. The late fourth-century church father Epiphanius, for example, in his *Panarion (Refutation of All Heresies)*, refers to a contemporary Quartodeciman sect called the Audians, who come from Syria⁵⁰ and support their position by reference to a work called the Diataxis (Ordinance) of the Apostles. This seems to be an early version of chapter 21 of the Didascalia (Teaching) of the Apostles,⁵¹ and thus probably goes back to the second century. In one passage (*Pan.* 70.11.3), the Diataxis parallels the Didascalia (cf. DA 21.5.12.5/188.11–12/205.16–17; 21.5.17/196.18–19/211.25–7; 21.5.20.9/201.17–20/217.16–19; 21.5.20.10/202.3–4/218.6–7) in calling for a paschal fast synchronised with the Jews' paschal banqueting:⁵²

50 According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 70.1.2), Audius, the supposed founder of the sect, was from Mesopotamia. F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* (2 vols.; Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 63, 79; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009–13) II.412 n. 1 notes that Theodore bar Koni identifies Audius as archdeacon of the church in Edessa. Connolly, *Didascalia*, lxxxvii observes that Ephrem, when he mentions the Audians (*Hymns against Heretics* 22), spells their name with an initial 'ayin (Theodore bar Koni does the same). Connolly concludes that the name has a Semitic origin and comes from Syria.

51 See E. Schwartz, *Christliche und jüdische Ostertafeln* (Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft zu Göttingen. Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Neue Folge 7.6; Berlin: Weidmann, 1905) 109–10.

52 Cf. G. A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe. Analyse théologique et recherche sur l'évolution de la fête pascale chrétienne à Nisibe et à Edesse et dans quelques églises voisines au quatrième siècle* (2 vols.; VC Supplement 7; Leiden/New York: Brill, 1989) I.182.

When they feast, you yourselves, by fasting, should mourn for them (ὕμεις νηστεύοντες ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν πενθεῖτε), for they crucified Christ on the day of the feast. And when they mourn on the Day of Unleavened Bread and eat with bitter herbs, you should feast. (trans. Williams, alt.)

This is germane for our purposes because it implies both opposition to the Jews and intercession on their behalf. On the one hand, as in the Gospel of Peter and the Didascalia, the Jews are identified as the crucifiers of Jesus, and Christian rites are sharply distinguished from Jewish ones: when they feast, you should mourn, and vice versa. This reverse synchronicity seems to be generally characteristic of the Quartodeciman movement and those (like the Didascalia's author) influenced by it; Gerard Rouwhorst therefore refers to the Quartodeciman paschal celebration as 'une sorte de anti-Pâque'.⁵³

But this anti-Jewish attitude is tempered in the Diataxis as in the Didascalia by identification with the Jews. For there is also a positive synchronicity here, in that the Christian rite is coordinated with the Jewish one; an earlier passage from the Diataxis, for example, calls Christians to 'celebrate when your brothers of the circumcision do (ποιεῖτε ὅταν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ὑμῶν οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς); celebrate at the same time with them (μετ' αὐτῶν ἅμα ποιεῖτε)' (*Pan.* 70.10.2).⁵⁴ Importantly, moreover, the Diataxis passage quoted in *Pan.* 70.11.3 calls upon Christians to fast not only simultaneously with but also *on behalf of* the Jews (ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν). Similarly, a late fourth-century Syrian text, the Apostolic Constitutions, which uses the Didascalia and seems to have a Quartodeciman provenance,⁵⁵ exhorts Christians to devote 'the holy week of Passover' to mourning over the Jews (πενθεῖν αὐτούς), lamenting their perdition (ὀδύρεσθαι ... ἐπὶ τῇ ἀπωλείᾳ αὐτῶν, 5.15), and fasting and praying for those who are perishing (νηστεύοντες ... προσευχόμενοι ... περὶ τῶν ἀπολλυμένων, 5.13). Fasting and prayer for the Jews during the Passover season, then, seems in the early centuries CE to have been widespread in Syrian circles related to the Didascalia, and these rites co-existed with blaming the Jews for Jesus' death. The author of the Gospel of Peter may have seen things in a similarly ambivalent way.⁵⁶ It is

53 Rouwhorst, *Hymnes*, 191–2.

54 Translation altered from Williams, *Panarion*, II.422.

55 See A. Ekenberg, 'Evidence for Jewish Believers in "Church Orders" and Liturgical Texts', *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 640–58, at 653 n. 38, who traces the work to Antioch around 380 CE.

56 Cf. B. Lohse, *Das Passafest der Quartadecimaner* (BFCT II.54; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1954) 63. G. Rouwhorst, 'The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach', *Questions Liturgiques* 99 (1996) 152–73, at 161–2 criticises Lohse for overgeneralising the positive attitude of the Didascalia and ascribing it to Quartodecimans in general. But Rouwhorst goes too far in the opposite direction when he asserts that most Quartodeciman Christians did not fast *for* the Jews but *against* them (similarly, Stewart-Sykes, *Feast*, 162). Rouwhorst appositely cites Melito and Ephrem (the former a Quartodeciman, the latter a non-Quartodeciman influenced by

noteworthy, in this regard, that all of the evidence about a paschal fast for the Jews comes from Syrian Quartodeciman circles (Diataxis, Apostolic Constitutions) or from a Syrian circle influenced by Quartodecimanism (the Didascalia). This is relevant because the Gospel of Peter also seems to come from a Syrian Quartodeciman environment.⁵⁷

5. The Gospel and the Apocalypse of Peter

So far I have shown that a positive interpretation of the Gospel of Peter's attitude towards the Jews is in line with the narrative arc of the Gospel and with philo-Judaic attitudes current in the Syrian environment, especially in circles related (as the Gospel of Peter is) to the Didascalia. I have also shown that some of those in such circles who fasted and prayed during the paschal season (as Peter and the other apostles do in the Gospel of Peter) did so to move God to inspire Jewish conversion to Christianity. One other building block of the argument remains to be put in place: the link of the Gospel of Peter with the Apocalypse of Peter.

The Apocalypse of Peter is a second-century Greek work that is bound next to the Gospel of Peter in the Akhmîm codex and inscribed in the same careful documentary hand, in distinction from the other works in the codex.⁵⁸ On the basis of this common treatment and some striking vocabulary and conceptual overlaps,⁵⁹ several scholars have argued convincingly that the two works once formed a unity.⁶⁰ It is also likely, however, that the Apocalypse of Peter had a separate

Quartodecimanism) as hostile to Jews and Judaism. But he does not mention ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν in the Diataxis (*Pan.* 70.11.3) or περὶ τῶν ἀπολλυμένων in the Apostolic Constitutions (5.13).
 57 See Stewart-Sykes, *Feast*, 26, citing GP's links with Melito (see above, n. 19), the custom of fasting until the Sabbath of the resurrection and the use of the Johannine chronology for Jesus' death (see GP 2.6).

58 For Greek text and German and English translation, see T. J. Kraus and T. Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (GCS N.F. 11/Neutestamentliche Apokryphen 1; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2004).

59 The most noteworthy of these are ἡμεῖς οἱ δώδεκα μαθηταί ('we the twelve disciples', GP 14.59; AP 5) and ὁ κύριος to the exclusion of Ἰησοῦς for the earthly Jesus; see M. R. James, 'The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter', *JTS* 32 (1931) 270–9, at 275; cf. *idem*, 'A New Text of the Apocalypse of Peter', *JTS* 12 (1911) 572–83, at 579.

60 A. Dietrich, *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893) 16; T. Zahn, *Grundriss der Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1901) 25 n. 16; James, 'New Text', 577–82; *idem*, 'The Recovery of the Apocalypse of Peter', *CQR* 80 (1915) 1–36, at 20–3; *idem*, 'Rainer Fragment', 275–8; T. Nicklas, 'Zwei petrinische Apokryphen im Akhmîm Codex oder eines? Kritische Anmerkungen und Gedanken', *Apocrypha* 16 (2005) 75–96.

existence before being incorporated into the Gospel, and it continued to circulate independently after its incorporation into the Gospel of Peter; indeed, references to the Apocalypse are more numerous than references to the Gospel.⁶¹ This would make the Apocalypse of Peter like the so-called ‘Little Apocalypse’ of Mark 13, which many scholars think had a separate existence before being incorporated into the Second Gospel.⁶² Another argument for the priority of the Apocalypse to the Gospel relates to the Ethiopic version of the Apocalypse, which is longer and apparently more primitive than the Akhmîm version, even though the manuscripts are later.⁶³ The most important plus of this version is chapter 2, which conflates and explains the two fig tree parables from the canonical Gospels (Mark 13.28–9 pars.; Luke 13.6–9) in a revealing way:⁶⁴

¹[Jesus said:] ‘But as for you, learn from the parable of the fig tree: as soon as its shoots have come forth and its branches become tender, then will be the end of the world.’

²I, Peter, answered him and said to him, ‘Interpret the fig tree for me – how can we understand, ³since day by day the fig tree sprouts, and every year it produces figs for its owners? [But] what the parable of the fig tree [means], we do not know.’

⁴The teacher answered me and said to me, ‘Do you not know that the fig tree is the house of Israel? ⁵It is like [this]: a man planted a fig tree in his garden, and it did not produce fruit, [even though] he sought its fruit for many years. When he found none he said to the gardener, “Uproot this fig tree, lest our land become useless to us.” ⁶The gardener said to his master, “Send us to weed it and hoe the dried earth beneath it and irrigate it with water. If it does not produce fruit, then we shall root it out from the garden and plant another in its place.”

⁷Do you not understand that the fig tree is the house of Israel? And indeed I told you [that] when its branches at last become tender, a false Messiah will come; ⁸and he will claim for himself, “I am the Christ who has come into the

61 See James, ‘Recovery’, 21–2.

62 On the ‘Little Apocalypse’, see J. Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible 27A; New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009) II.864–6.

63 For a side-by-side comparison, see C. Müller and G. Detlef, ‘Apocalypse of Peter’, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. II (ed. W. Schneemelcher; Cambridge: James Clarke & Co/Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 620–38, at 625–35. On the Ethiopic manuscripts, see James, ‘New Text’; *idem*, ‘Recovery’, 5–6; R. Bauckham, ‘The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research’, *ANRW* (1988) II.25.6. 4712–50, at 4713–18; D. D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (SBLDS 97; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 413–24 (for a critical text and detailed discussion, see *ibid.*, 119–55).

64 Translation from J. V. Hills, ‘Parables, Pretenders and Prophecies: Translation and Interpretation in the *Apocalypse of Peter 2*’, *RevB* 98 (1991) 560–73, at 571–2, with some alterations to punctuation.

world.” But when they have seen his evil deeds, they will turn away; ⁹they will not believe him who is called “the glory of our fathers” – [our fathers] who crucified him who was Christ from the beginning, and [in so doing] greatly erred. ¹⁰But this liar is not the Christ. When they reject him, he will make war with the sword, and there will be many martyrs.

¹¹Then, therefore, the branches of the fig tree – that is, the house of Israel alone – will have sprouted; many will be martyrs at his hand. Many will die and become martyrs. ¹²For Enoch and Elijah will be sent to make them understand that this is the deceiver who is to come into the world to do signs and wonders in order to deceive. ¹³For this reason those who die at his hand will be martyrs, and will be numbered with the good and righteous martyrs who have pleased God with their lives.’

Richard Bauckham has argued, convincingly in my view, that the ‘Liar’ here is Simon Bar Kochba, the leader of the abortive Jewish revolt against the Romans in 132–5 CE, who is called ‘the Son of the Liar’ in rabbinic sources and who, according to Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 31.6), persecuted and killed Christians when they rejected his messianic claims.⁶⁵ On the basis of this identification, Bauckham concludes that the Apocalypse of Peter was written by and for Palestinian Jewish Christians during the Bar Kochba Revolt, which would give the Apocalypse about fifteen or twenty years of independent existence before being incorporated into the Gospel of Peter around mid-century.

The relationship of the Gospel to the Apocalypse of Peter, and the priority of the Ethiopic version of the latter, are important for our purposes because the Ethiopic text of the Apocalypse is an amazingly philo-Judaic text. This is true despite the fact that the fig tree parable here retains and even magnifies the warning element found in Luke 13.6–9: if the fig tree does not bear fruit in short order, it will be uprooted and replaced by another tree. This replacement motif is similar to the one in another Synoptic parable, that of the vineyard, especially as interpreted by Matthew (21.43). In Matthew, however, the replacement of the original plant is not (as in Luke 13.6–9) merely a threat but (at least for Matthew’s audience) a *fait accompli*.⁶⁶

Quite the opposite, however, seems to be implied by the Ethiopic version of the Apocalypse of Peter: instead of being uprooted, the original fig tree, which

65 For a good summary of Bauckham’s arguments, see E. Tigchelaar, ‘Is the Liar Bar Kochba? Considering the Date and Provenance of the Greek (Ethiopic) *Apocalypse of Peter*’, *The Apocalypse of Peter* (ed. J. N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz; Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 63–75, at 64–5. Tigchelaar himself pronounces these arguments ‘possible and tempting, but ... not conclusive’ (p. 64). On the next page, however, he sounds more positive: ‘None of the arguments are in themselves compelling, but the elements taken together seem to be strongly indicative of the identification.’

66 See W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–97) III.186.

is thrice decoded as ‘the house of Israel’, will be restored to God’s good graces. As Bauckham puts it, ‘The Jewish Christian author of the Apocalypse of Peter ... unlike the “Matthean” churches ... remains loyal to the national hope of his people and continues to hope for a large-scale conversion of the Jews to Jesus Christ.’ Although the parable itself, in probable dependence on Matt 21.33–43, speaks of uprooting the fig tree (= Israel) and planting another tree (= the church) in its place, this is not how the author of the Apocalypse interprets it.⁶⁷ Rather, as Bauckham puts it:

He regards Israel’s opportunity to bear fruit as still open and expects her to bear fruit in the near future, as the last sign of the approaching parousia. Had he been rewriting the parable from the point of view of his own interpretation of it, he would surely have ended with the gardener’s expressing hope that the tree would bear fruit.⁶⁸

The Apocalypse of Peter, then, removes the ambiguity found in the Lukan parable: ‘the keeper of the garden’ will not labour in vain. Rather, the Israel-tree’s shoot will burst forth and its branches will sprout, and that will be the sign of the end of the world (vv. 1, 8, 11). The Israel-tree will *not* be replaced by another tree, because the fig tree is the house of Israel *alone* (ⲁⲧ: ⲗⲓⲗⲉⲗⲁ: ⲣⲁⲧⲧⲉⲛ, v. 11). Although many Jews will be deluded by the lies of the false messiah Bar Kochba, in the end Elijah and Enoch will return to restore the true form of their ancient faith (v. 12) – that is, the one that recognises Jesus as the true Messiah and the culmination of Jewish history.

The Ethiopic version of Apocalypse of Peter 2, therefore, is one of the most powerful of the infrequent expressions of hope for Israel in the early church. It is not surprising, then, to hear the church historian Sozomen report that, as late as the fifth century, this apocalypse was ‘still being read in some of the churches of Palestine on the day of preparation, when the whole people fasts reverently (εὐλαβῶς ἅπασι ὁ λαὸς νηστεύει) in memory of the passion of the Savior’ (ἐπὶ ἀναμνήσει τοῦ σωτηρίου πάθους, *Hist. eccl.* 7.19.9).⁶⁹ As we have seen, in neighbouring Syria a paschal fast ‘in memory of the passion of the Savior’ was often a fast for the Jews as well.⁷⁰ Sozomen’s account of Palestinian Christians reading the Apocalypse of Peter during this paschal fast dovetails perfectly with the hopeful message of the Ethiopic version of that work.

67 R. Bauckham, ‘The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter’, *JBL* 104 (1985) 269–87, at 282–3 sees the fig tree parable in Apocalypse of Peter 2 as a pre-existent tradition embodying a ‘Matthean’ theology but taken up and adapted in a different direction by the author of the Apocalypse.

68 Bauckham, ‘Fig Tree Parables’, 283.

69 Translation of C. D. Hartranft from *NPNF*, altered.

70 On Palestine as part of the ‘East’ that, according to Nicene Christians, was infected with a tendency to observe Passover ‘with the Jews’, see Rouwhorst, *Hymnes*, 1.131.

6. The Lost Ending of the Gospel of Peter

But why does this philo-Judaic passage appear only in the Ethiopic, not in the Akhmîm Greek, version of the Apocalypse of Peter? Peter van Minnen has argued that the Akhmîm scribe had an anti-Jewish slant, and that he deliberately excised such pro-Jewish elements. Indeed, Van Minnen goes further, asserting that this scribe subjected both the Apocalypse and the Gospel of Peter to an anti-Jewish redaction.⁷¹

In my opinion, this theory may shed light on the missing end of the Gospel. The latter terminates at the bottom of a page with an incomplete sentence, which apparently went on to describe a resurrection appearance: 'And there was with us Levi of Alphaeus whom the Lord ...' This must be where the Akhmîm scribe intended his manuscript to end, since this half-sentence is followed by an ornamental border and two blank pages. Presumably, if the scribe had more text he wanted to copy, he would have omitted the border and continued onto the next page. Why did he not do so?

The usual explanation has been that the *Vorlage* of the Gospel was defective, but Van Minnen points out that both the manuscript of the Gospel and the manuscript of the Apocalypse begin with a proper sentence, and the Apocalypse ends with one. He therefore considers the hypothesis of a defective *Vorlage* unlikely.⁷² I would add that it is *prima facie* implausible that the *Vorlage* ended precisely where the Akhmîm scribe's space ran out, especially since the letters at the bottom of the last page show signs neither of crowding nor of expansion.

I believe that the argument of this essay provides a plausible explanation for this deliberately interrupted ending: as the scribe cut from the Apocalypse a passage that was hopeful about the future of the Jews, so he excised from the Gospel its philo-Judaic ending. In that ending, Jesus appeared to Peter and the other apostles on the Sea of Galilee and commissioned them to return to their people to continue the work, which he had begun on the cross, of separating them from their recalcitrant and deceitful leaders, and thereby converting them to faith in the one they had crucified. The concluding missionary appeal of the Gospel, then, had the same message as the missionary speeches to Jews in Acts 2-3: 'You killed him ... but God raised him up ... therefore repent' (see Acts 2.23-4, 36-9; 3.14-21). Here Jewish blood-guilt for Jesus' death does not preclude Jewish repentance but motivates it.

71 Van Minnen ('Akhmîm *Gospel of Peter*', 59) sees this hostility as revealed in the opening of the Akhmîm version of the Apocalypse, 'Many of them will be pseudoprophets', which is absent in the Ethiopic version, and which he thinks the Akhmîm scribe means to apply to the Jews.

72 Van Minnen, 'Akhmîm *Gospel of Peter*', 55.