

5. The Jerusalem Connection.

The synoptics truncate Jesus' ministry to a period of no longer than one year and do not mention any visits to Jerusalem until the time of the Passion (That is apart from one visit with his family at the age of twelve as recorded in Luke.). Hence, if the synoptic chronology is to be believed, it would appear unlikely that Jesus would have developed a substantial following in Jerusalem. However even the synoptics imply that there was a following which is just another reason for not wishing to accept the synoptic chronology. We have already noted that there is evidence from antiquity also.

John, on the other hand, gives a ministry of about three years and describes many trips to Jerusalem during that period for the Passover and other religious festivals. I believe that John is to be accepted in this regard. By the time of the last visit to Jerusalem it is apparent that Jesus did have quite a following, including two wealthy and influential citizens; Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (referred to as 'Arimathea' below). Nicodemus is mentioned several times in John (but never in the synoptics.) Apart from Nicodemus the Jerusalem disciples (as I loosely call any devotee of Jesus) have only fleeting and enigmatic references. It does appear that the reason for this is that there was little communication between the Jerusalem group and the 'Galilean' disciples. The majority of our witness appears to have come from the Galilean source. Perhaps Jesus had his reasons for keeping them apart. There were also class differences. The Jerusalem Connection comprised people from a different world, the sophistication of the city, a set apart from the 'country yokels' of Galilee. Nicodemus and Arimathea were wealthy and influential citizens and members of the Sanhedrin. It is apparent that little or no witness from the Jerusalem Connection has survived and this has left a mystifying gap in the records. The reason for this lack of witness is also mystifying. It appears that certain key players may have departed from Jerusalem shortly after the crucifixion leaving behind no record of their doings. There are references in the gospels, particularly John, to minutes of meetings of the Sanhedrin and these could only have originated from Nicodemus or Arimathea. It is fairly clear that Jesus had a line through to the Jewish council via these two members, if not others. Also the witness to the interview of Jesus with Annas could only have only have come from 'the other disciple who knew the high priest' who may also have been witness to the conversation with Pilate next morning. I speculate below that this disciple may have been a member of the Jerusalem connection.

The following, somewhat enigmatic, passage from John indicates how the Jerusalem following began to form:

2:23 While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. 2:24 But Jesus would

not trust himself to them because he knew them all, 2:25 and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

Another passage in John describes how he confronted a crowd in the temple during the feast of Dedication. Some of the crowd were in opposition but there were some that believed.

10:39 (Then) they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power. 10:40 He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. 10:41 Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." 10:42 And many there began to believe in him.

I have read very little concerning the Connection as a whole so will now delineate all the characters involved.

5.1 Nicodemus.

Some information is given in the Catholic Encyclopedia:

A prominent Jew of the time of Christ, mentioned only in the Fourth Gospel. The name is of Greek origin, but at that epoch such names were occasionally borrowed by the Jews, and according to Josephus (Ant. of the Jews, XIV, iii, 2) Nicodemus was the name of one of the ambassadors sent by Aristobulus to Pompey. A Hebrew form of the name (Naqdimon) is found in the Talmud. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and in his capacity of sanhedrist, (John, vii, 50) was a leader of the Jews. Christ, in the interview when Nicodemus came to him by night, calls him a master in Israel. Judging from John xix, 39, Nicodemus must have been a man of means, and it is probable that he wielded a certain influence in the Sanhedrim. Some writers conjecture from his question: "How can a man be born when he is old?", that he was already advanced in years, but the words are too general to warrant such a conclusion. He appears in this interview as a learned and intelligent believer, but timid and not easily initiated into the mysteries of the new faith. He next appears (John, vii, 50, 51) in the Sanhedrim offering a word in defence of the accused Galilean; and we may infer from this passage that he embraced the truth as soon as it was fully made known to him. He is mentioned finally in John, xix, 39, where he is shown co-operating with Joseph of Arimathea in the embalming and burial of Jesus.

The Encyclopaedia does not mention a second reference in Josephus which I note below. The reference cited above could not refer to the Nicodemus of the gospels as it refers to an event which occurred about 60 BCE. I agree with most of the encyclopaedia report except for the word timid. Perhaps 'careful' or 'conservative' might be a better word. He is the one person who is reported upon reasonably extensively and a real character emerges. It is this consistency of character which leads me to believe that he may have been an historical figure. As to the witness who recorded these events concerning Nicodemus, it must have been the disciple John.

a) Firstly, during a Passover, earlier than that of the Passion, he comes to Jesus secretly at night seeking instruction. The passage in chapter 3 of John gives insight into Nicodemus's personality.

3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (* NAB NOTE: A ruler of the Jews: most likely a member of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin.) 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."*

To call Nicodemus a Pharisee would imply that he was closely involved with the movement, possibly some sort of lay preacher in fact. The statement that he came by night would indicate that it was a clandestine meeting. It implies that Nicodemus would not wish other Pharisees to know that he had come. (There are indications in the Gospels of doctrinal conflict between Jesus and Pharisees.) Nicodemus is shown here as someone of an enquiring mind who is prepared to investigate an alternative philosophy but wishes to be fully informed before he makes any decision to embrace it fully.

*3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born *from above." (NAB NOTE: From above: the Greek adverb anōthen means both "from above" and "again." Jesus means "from above" (see John 3:31) but Nicodemus misunderstands it as "again." This misunderstanding serves as a springboard for further instruction.) 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"*

I do not know if the confusion over the Greek word would exist in Aramaic. However it is (just) possible that they were speaking in Greek. Nicodemus is shown here as being a little obtuse and obviously influenced by the restrictive thinking of the Pharisees. It is quite possible that this obtuseness and punning was an invention of the author of John. (Called 'Johnine irony'.)

3:5 Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 3:6 What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. 3:7 Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.' 3:8 The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

This passage sounds like authentic Jesus' philosophy and this is supported by the presence of the oratorical catchphrase. The word used in the text for 'wind' is synonymous with 'spirit' in both the original Greek and its Hebrew equivalent.

3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can this happen?" 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? 3:11 Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony.

Jesus' reply to Nicodemus' question shows his ironic sense of humour (not all that well realised in this translation.). Verse 11 seems to be authentic and contains the oratorical catchphrase however from this point on the passage the pronoun changes from singular to plural. (The 'royal' we.) These ensuing verses (which I don't copy) I believe to perhaps have come from the original witness, (the disciple John), but to have been subsequently re-worked considerably by the author of John (who was not the disciple.) Much of this reworking has had a fundamental effect on Church dogma.

b) On a later occasion, during the feast of the Tabernacles, Nicodemus is portrayed as supporting Jesus in a meeting of 'Pharisees'. (This may have been the Sanhedrin.)

7:50 Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, 7:51 "Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?"

Again this shows Nicodemus's liberal views and his courage in supporting Jesus in spite of establishment opposition. It appears that by this stage Nicodemus has become a committed follower of Jesus.

c) He is mentioned finally as assisting Arimathea in Jesus' burial rites. I'll discuss this passage in detail in following chapters.

*19:38 *After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. 19:39 Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. 19:40 They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom.*

d) A Nicodemus is mentioned twice in Josephus. The earliest reference, cited by the Catholic Encyclopaedia above, could not be the Nicodemus of the Gospels. The later reference is in *The War of the Jews* 2.17.10. The time is in the early stages of the war, about 65 CE. The passage describes a situation where Gorion, the son of Nicodemus and some others are sent to negotiate with a group of captured Roman soldiers. Nothing is said about Nicodemus himself, however the implication is that he was an important citizen or his son was. It is quite possible that this Nicodemus is the Nicodemus of John. The age seems about right and the reference implies that he was a person of some influence, which agrees with the reportage in the Gospels.

10. And, as I said, so far truly the people assisted them, while they hoped this might afford some amendment to the seditious practices; but the others were not in haste to put an end to the war, but hoped to prosecute it with less danger, now they had slain Manahem. It is true, that when the people earnestly desired that

they would leave off besieging the soldiers, they were the more earnest in pressing it forward, and this till Metilius, who was the Roman general, sent to Eleazar, and desired that they would. give them security to spare their lives only; but agreed to deliver up their arms, and what else they had with them. The others readily complied with their petition, sent to them Gorion, the son of Nicodemus, and Ananias, the son of Sadduk, and Judas, the son of Jonathan, that they might give them the security

However the petition was not successful, the Roman soldiers were attacked and some were killed.

5.2 The owner of the ass's colt.

I discuss in ensuing chapters the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on the back of a colt of an ass and how this was his way of announcing that he was Messiah. The event occurred about a week before the Passover of the Passion. It is not known who the owners of the colt were. What is known is that Jesus knew that a colt would be in a certain place and would be delivered to the person who gave an agreed upon password phrase. The disciples apparently did not have any knowledge of dealings Jesus may have had with the owners. The passage is presented in a way that implies that Jesus may have had Divine Knowledge concerning this colt, and this may have been the effect he was intending to promote. It is possible that the owners of the colt were not from Jerusalem, however they were certainly persons unknown to the Galilean disciples. The episode implies very careful planning. The synoptics say that the colt was found at a village that they came upon as they were drawing near to Jerusalem from Galilee. This is improbable. It is likely that Jesus was at Bethany before the ride into Jerusalem, as John says.

The story is only in the synoptics, which are pretty much in agreement. I quote from Luke.

19:29 As he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples. 19:30 He said, "Go into the village opposite you, and as you enter it you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 19:31 And if anyone should ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' you will answer, 'The Master has need of it.'" 19:32 So those who had been sent went off and found everything just as he had told them. 19:33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying this colt?" 19:34 They answered, "The Master has need of it."

5.3 The Owner of the Upper Room.

I quote from Mark, which is generally followed by the other synoptics:

*14:12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 14:13 He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. * Follow him. 14:14 Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" 14:15 Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." 14:16 The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.*

** NAB NOTE: A man . . . carrying a jar of water: perhaps a prearranged signal, for only women ordinarily carried water in jars. The Greek word used here, however, implies simply a person and not necessarily a male.*

As a digression; there has been a lot of comment concerning this man with the jar of water (including comparisons with the zodiacal sign of Aquarius.) Fairly obviously, for someone to stand out and be recognised, amongst a multitude of female water carriers, it would have to be a male. I also note that in certain communities comprising solely males, such as the Roman army or the Essenes, the males would have to carry the water. I mention the Essenes because an Essene tradition would solve certain problems with the dating of Passover in the year of the Passion. (I discuss the dating of the Passion in chapter 10.) There are other indications of Essene involvement, although nothing is ever mentioned about Essenes in the gospels.

I do have a few concerns concerning the nature of the meal however. I discuss this later. We can be certain that it was the last meal shared with the disciples while Jesus was alive in his mundane body.

It appears that the unidentified owner was probably quite affluent. This house is located by tradition in the Upper City, a suburb in the south-west corner of Jerusalem. (Refer to the map.) This was the best part of town. Caiaphas and probably Annas lived close by. Although information is somewhat sketchy it is possible to draw up a picture of these wealthy men's houses. They were quadrangular blocks of two stories with a courtyard in the centre. Apparently they were not set in grounds so adjacent houses would abut against each other. Entrance to the courtyard and thence the house would be via an archway or alley which passed through the body of the building. According to John in his description of the High Priest's house to which Jesus was taken after his arrest, there was a gate here which was guarded by a gatekeeper. The large guest room mentioned above was probably a common feature of such houses, being commonly used for

entertaining and dinner parties. These houses were probably quite large, having to accommodate numerous servants.

Just as with the ass's colt we see that Jesus has been making elaborate arrangements and keeping the disciples in the dark. One cannot really understand the reason for the trick with the water carrier. Jesus could perhaps have told them the address. Even if the disciples were liable to have got lost in a strange town he could have made more direct arrangements for them to be shown to the house.

5.4 The young man in the garden.

This is one of those seemingly irrelevant incidents which have no apparent significance or obvious midrashic underlay. Because of this I am liable to believe that it actually happened. The reference appears only in Mark. It is interesting that Matthew does not include it his gospel as he omits very little from Mark. On the face of it the incident appears to be meaningless and inexplicable. This may be the reason for its omission. It occurs as Jesus is being led off after being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

14:51 Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, 14:52 but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.

There is an interesting, but unlikely, theory that the young man went there to indulge in some secret mystic rites. This is based on fragments from a putative 'Secret Gospel of Mark' where Jesus spends the night indulging in 'secret rites' with a young man in a linen cloth whom he has formerly raised from the dead. (One may, no doubt, consider the implications attendant on Jesus spending a night with a young man in a linen cloth.) This young man is not named, but is naturally identified as Lazarus. I think we can put the idea of someone wanting to indulge in secret rites to one side. It would be a strange to want to do in the circumstances. (The fragment concerning 'Lazarus' is not authenticated, however does have some points in its favour.)

I feel that we can link this youth to the Jerusalem connection, and explain why he was there. If it were just a young man who happened to be in the garden that night nothing could be gleaned. However the fact is that he followed so closely behind Jesus that the guards managed to seize him and he only escaped by wriggling out of his clothes. This indicates to me that he must have had some interest in what was happening to Jesus. The conjecture that has come to mind is that he was a member of the Jerusalem Connection who had been sent to the garden that night to observe and report back. (I believe that the Connection knew something about what was going on, a matter I discuss more fully in chapter 9.)

The linen costume is another link. Linen was (and still is) very expensive and this indicates that the young man might have been from an affluent family. Wealth

does seem to be one of the attributes of members of the Connection. We have noted above that Nicodemus and Arimathea were responsible for the burial of Jesus' body in the tomb after the crucifixion. The gospels all state that there were young men or 'angels' in or around the tomb at the time of the 'resurrection' who were dressed in white which indicates linen. I have read somewhere the suggestion that this dress was some sort of uniform of a secret order however this is a doubtful proposition.

Linen is also a very good insulator which would explain the 'nothing but' phrase in the quotation above. The disciples commonly wore clothes made of wool, probably in double layers as it was a cold night and no doubt were not affluent enough to have experienced the insulating properties of linen.

5.5 The disciple who was known to the high priest.

According to John, when Jesus was arrested he was taken to the high priest Annas.

18:15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. 18:16 But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in.

I have no idea what the name of this person is so, for convenience, will call him Fred.

John does not have the complement of twelve disciples that the synoptics have. The more important ones are there but there are cases of un-named disciples who I believe to be different people. There is the well known 'beloved disciple' who is generally thought to be John although a number of people have theories that he or she may be someone else. John 21 also indicates another unnamed disciple. I do not know why John kept the names of certain disciples anonymous. My only conjecture is that they were not members of the 'twelve' and the author of John, having read the synoptics, did not wish to contradict them.

It is generally considered that this disciple was John, (or the beloved disciple if that wasn't John), however I cannot accept that. John was a Galilean disciple and would not have the time or opportunity to get to know the high priest. He would not be the sort of person a high priest would hobnob with, being a somewhat uncultured fisherman and member of the lower classes. Fred on the other hand had obviously visited the house on previous occasions as the gatekeeper knew him and granted entry. It may be that Fred went into the house and discussed the matter of Peter's entry with Annas. I get this from the phrase 'went out' in 18:16. Whatever the case he was well known enough to allow Peter safe passage through the gate.

Fred appeared out of the blue after all the other disciples had supposedly fled. It is not explained exactly where he came from. While the above logic suggests that he came from Jerusalem there is nothing here that associates him with the Jerusalem Connection. I speculate in chapter 9 concerning a possible association.

5.6 Joseph of Arimathea.

Arimathea is mentioned in one context in all gospels as claiming the body of Jesus from the cross and then being responsible for the burial. (I have quoted from John above. John adds the presence of Nicodemus and the anointing spices to the synoptics reports.) The following from Mark is typical of the synoptics.

15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 15:44 Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. 15:45 And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. 15:46 Having bought a linen cloth, he took him down, wrapped him in the linen cloth and laid him in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb.

It is certainly somewhat remarkable that such a distinguished person should take control of the interment procedures, that he should have audience with Pilate, that he should have a tomb and burial ceremonies readily available. He was an eminent person, a member of the Sanhedrin and a follower of Jesus. Luke adds that he came originally from the town of Arimathea.

23:50 Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council, 23:51 had not consented to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God.

The town, Arimathea, has not been positively identified. It is thought that it might be Ramatha, the birthplace of the Prophet Samuel, although several scholars prefer to identify it with the town of Ramleh. We have the picture of a man coming to the big city from a small town and making good. There is a good reason for the surname as it was needed to distinguish him from another Joseph on the Sanhedrin, Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest and leader of the council.

I have read the theory (in Spong) that Arimathea did not, in fact, exist and was merely a midrashic invention based on a prediction in Isaiah that the Messiah would be buried with a rich man. (The complete passage in Isaiah chapter 53, which is used to great effect in Handel's sacred oratorio, seems to presage the death of Jesus and may well have added fuel to certain myths which have been fostered by the Church.)

ISAIAH: 53:9 *A grave was assigned him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers, Though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood.*

We can note that the phrase 'rich man' in the King James Version has been replaced by the word 'evildoers' in the NAB translation. I do not know why this is. I do not accept that Arimathea was a midrashic invention. If he was he would have been buried in the tomb together with Jesus. Also I note the reality of the surname, which would hardly have been invented by a gospel writer.

There are certain legends prevalent about Arimathea, namely that he went to Gaul in 63 CE and thence to Great Britain, where he is supposed to have founded the earliest Christian oratory at Glastonbury. Various books have been written suggesting that, after the crucifixion, he accompanied Mary Magdalene, who was pregnant with Jesus' child to Egypt and thence to France. While these theories are interesting, and may have some basis in fact, they do not impinge seriously on this book except to provide explanation for the disappearance of Arimathea from the record.

5.7 The 'angels' in the tomb.

Mark 16:5 On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed.

Matthew 28:2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. 28:3 His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow.

Luke 24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; 24:3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 24:4 While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them.

John 20:11 But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb 20:12 and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been.

The records are inconsistent however all reports state that the young men in the tomb wore white. This indicates that the fabric of their clothes may have been linen, which relates to the young man in the garden (above.) We can also note that Essenes always wore white. Some of the reports refer to the young men as 'angels', however the most likely explanation is that they were associates of Nicodemus and Arimathea .

Jesus was placed in the tomb on the eve of the Sabbath (Saturday). We note that the Sabbath would have commenced, as was Jewish custom, at sunset on Friday evening and would have extended to sunset on Saturday evening. During this time custom dictated that it was not permissible to attend to the body. The women could have come after sunset on the Saturday to anoint the body but instead waited until early morning, probably because there would have been no

light in the evening. (Jewish Monday started after sunset on the Saturday.) It is quite clear that something happened in the tomb between sunset and sunrise on the Monday. Whatever it was you can be pretty certain that Nicodemus, Arimathea and their followers were involved. Whatever actually did occur is one of the great mysteries, however it is not the purpose of this book to go into that. It is quite possible that the body was removed during the night. Jewish custom would not prevent this. When the women arrived to anoint the body the stone over the mouth of the tomb had been rolled away. The burial cloths were removed carefully from the body and the body itself was gone. There were either one or two young men or 'angels' present as we have discussed.