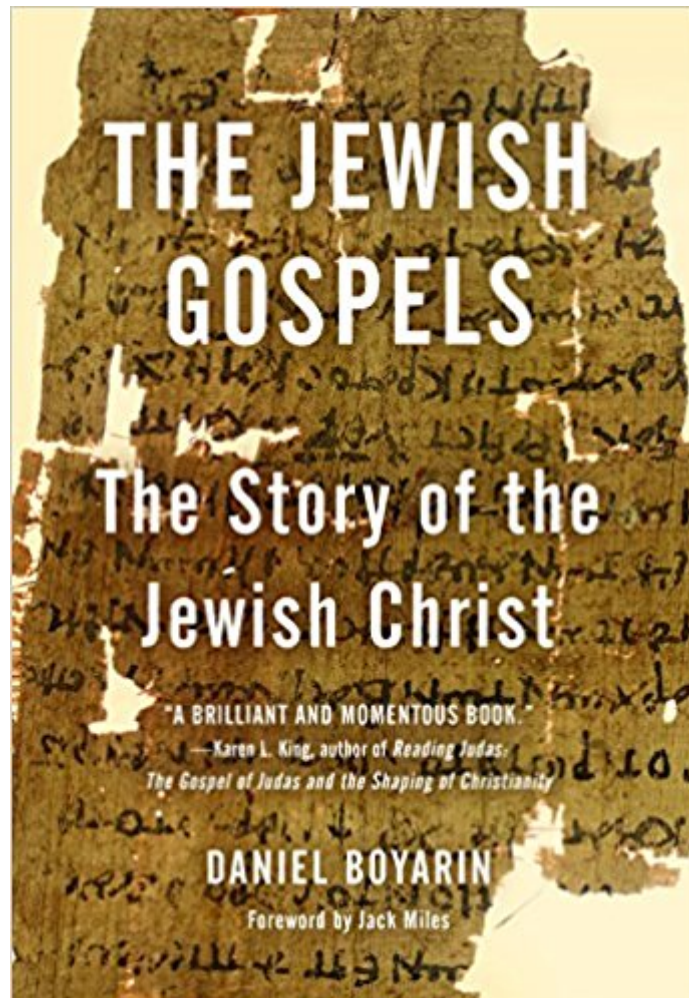




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The Jewish Gospels: The Story Of The Jewish Christ



Synopsis

In July 2008 a front-page story in the New York Times reported on the discovery of an ancient Hebrew tablet, dating from before the birth of Jesus, which predicted a Messiah who would rise from the dead after three days. Commenting on this startling discovery at the time, noted Talmud scholar Daniel Boyarin argued that "some Christians will find it shocking; a challenge to the uniqueness of their theology." In this powerful, groundbreaking work, Boyarin guides us through a rich tapestry of new discoveries and ancient scriptures to make the powerful case that our conventional understandings of Jesus and of the origins of Christianity are wrong.

Boyarin's scrupulously illustrated account argues that the coming of the Messiah was fully imagined in the ancient Jewish texts. Jesus, moreover, was embraced by many Jews as this person, and his core teachings were not at all a break from Jewish beliefs and teachings. Jesus and his followers, Boyarin shows, were simply Jewish. What came to be known as Christianity came much later, as religious and political leaders sought to impose a new religious orthodoxy that was not present at the time of Jesus's life. Published in hardcover to nationwide attention and now available for the first time in paperback, this brilliant work will continue to challenge some of our most cherished assumptions.

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Customer Reviews

"A brilliant and momentous book." —Karen L. King, Harvard Divinity School "Raises profound questions . . . this provocative book will change the way we think of the Gospels in their Jewish context." —John J. Collins, Yale Divinity School "It's certainly noteworthy when one

of the world. "One of our leading Jewish scholars publishes a book about Jesus . . . extremely stimulating." — Daniel C. Peterson, The Deseret News "[A] fascinating recasting of the story of Jesus." — Elliot Wolfson, New York University

Daniel Boyarin, Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture and rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships. His books include "A Radical Jew," "Border Lines," and "Socrates and the Fat Rabbis." He lives in Berkeley, California.

This book was written by a Jewish scholar, with the apparent intent of demonstrating the Jewish character of Jesus of Nazareth and the Gospels to a lay Christian audience. Dr. Boyarin cites a number of informative references from the Mishnah and Talmud that few Christians would know about. He offers his own informed interpretation of the diversity of Messianic expectations in the first Centuries BCE and CE. And he goes on to discuss the Son of Man character from the Book of Daniel as the prototype for, or as prophecy of, Jesus as the Son of God. At the same time, the only mention of the suffering "Messiah ben Joseph" is relegated to an end note. Other scholars have linked that particular Messianic character to Jesus. I believe that it would have further strengthened Dr. Boyarin's hypothesis had he discussed it. A glossary would have been a very helpful addition to the book, as it contains a number of words and concepts that the target audience is not likely to understand. Dr. Boyarin makes some sweeping assumptions about what Christians believe regarding the Trinity and Incarnation. That's what you expect when a scholar of one faith tradition writes for an audience of a different one. Readers interested in the Biblical version of Jesus will likely find new and interesting material in this book. Still, I felt somewhat disappointed with it.

Daniel Boyarin has done a great service for the Body of Christ and especially for those who are involved in the study of the Jewish Roots of Christianity. Over the past few decades it has become increasingly clear that to understand more fully the New Testament writings we need to have a greater, more in-depth understanding of the conceptual and cultural world in which these texts were written...and this is primarily the world of Judaism. Understanding the Jewish conceptual and cultural world in which Jesus, the disciples and writers of the New Testament lived and moved in has opened up the richness of Scripture and given it greater clarity in innumerable ways. One area that has now been greatly enriched by understanding the Jewish Background involves the Deity of Jesus. Boyarin's work deftly demonstrates through the use of various streams of Jewish thought and literary works that the idea of a Divine Messiah was not foreign to Jewish thought and belief....and

was even expected. He lays out the various beliefs about the Messiah down through the centuries before and during the time of Jesus using texts such as Daniel 7:13-14, the Similitudes of Enoch, First Ezra as well as insights from the Talmud and other rabbinic literature that may reflect earlier Jewish thought on this subject. Boyarin's view is that the seeds of the concept of a divine Messiah were present in Judaism before and during the time of Jesus. This is important for three reasons :1. It explains how the first century disciples and followers of Jesus could believe that Jesus is God/deity. Boyarin's work demonstrates pretty well that such a belief and concept was NOT outside the scope of Jewish belief within the First century². It helps present day believer in Jesus, who also study the Jewish roots of the faith to see that there is no contradiction between Jewish Monotheism and belief in the deity of Jesus. This has become an increasing problem and a source of cognitive dissonance for some within the "Jewish Roots" movement and Messianic Judaism. "Would first century, observant Jews who hold that there is but one God also hold to a belief that the Man Jesus is also God? How does this fit with Jewish/rabbinic belief in monotheism?" This has led some to deny the deity of Jesus while holding to his Messiah-ship as they are seeking to be faithful to their understanding of Judaism of the First Century and of the Bible. Hopefully Boyarin's book will help many to see that if they take into account that there are different and various views concerning the Messiah within early Jewish thought itself (and not just within the Talmud) then they will see that Jesus as a "divine messiah" is not a contradiction at all but rather is in harmony with different streams of Jewish thought in the First century Jewish World.³ It locates Jesus' divinity in his Identification of Himself as The Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14; This helps us to see that Jesus' view of Himself was NOT shaped by later Christians borrowing these ideas from the Roman concept of Cesar as the divine son of god (or borrowing the concept from other pagan sources concerning a god-man) This work is also important because it helps to clarify Paul's presentation of Jesus in his epistle's as a cosmic, transcendent Being. Boyarin's work does not directly or specifically focus on Paul or his portrayal of Jesus but it does help to give an understanding as to how Paul may have come to his view of Jesus. Paul's view of Jesus is the Jewish View of the Divine Messiah/Son of Man. What I would like to have seen in the book is more development of some of Boyarin's ideas in detail. But what is written is enough to motivate myself and others to do further research on this fascinating subject by seeking out at my local theological library the numerous scholarly articles and books listed in his footnotes. Another great aspect of the book is chapter three "Jesus kept kosher" . Here Boyarin demonstrates that Jesus, far from doing away with the laws of Kashrut was actually Kosher himself and was giving his halakha on a question concerning the rules of clean and unclean. I had read David Biven's synopsis of Yair Furstenberg's article (Defilement Penetrating the Body: A

New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7:15 in New Testament Studies #54, 2008) in a Jerusalem Perspective online article a few years ago and then later read the full article by Furstenberg himself. Boyarin does a great job of simplifying and clarifying what was really going on in Mark 7:1-15. I especially liked the distinction he makes between the categories of clean and unclean and permitted and prohibited -with Mark 7 being about clean and unclean and Kashrut being about what foods are permitted and not permitted (or prohibited for food) -an important distinction that has been missed by many Christian commentaries on Mark 7:1-15 , leading to a misinterpretation of the meaning of the entire passage. Boyarin is not a Christian nor a Messianic believer in Jesus. The book is thus not an attempt to try and win Jews over to a belief in Jesus and his divinity. Boyarin stated goals early in the book (pages 6-7) are to change the vilifying dialogue between Jews and Christians that has gone on for centuries and to foster a better understanding of each other; and also to offer a challenge (and I would say critique) of liberal Christian scholars who see the idea of a divine, suffering Messiah as having been invented by the later Christians leaders who foisted these ideas upon the church. Boyarin again shows throughout the book that these ideas pre-date the time of Jesus and are found within Judaism itself. The book is an easy read and one that I feel further advances the understanding of the Jewish Roots of Christianity. I thought the book important enough that I bought a copy for a friend of mine and plan to re-read it myself. This is a book I highly recommend.

Jesus was Jewish. Paul was Jewish. The first Christians were Jewish. Initially, followers of Jesus considered themselves to be a legitimate Jewish sect, and they were considered so by others, especially the Romans. The early Christians saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, while other Jews disagreed. Rabbi Boyarin does a wonderful job of highlighting the original Jewish disagreement and explaining how, with time and expansion of Christianity into the Gentile world, the argument changed. This book is, in my opinion, and absolutely must read for Christians who wish to deepen their understanding of the NT, as well as for Christians and Jews who wish to engage in dialogue about the commonalities and differences between our respective faiths.

I used it on my thesis entitled: Those Who Heard It First: The Political Implications of the Sermon on the Mount to Jesus' Jewish Audience as found on too. I think it adds good details to second temple research. It gave some good research points I could use. The current trend is to show the Jewish origins of Jesus and this book shows the development of a Jewish Jesus.

Many think that Judaism and Christianity are opposed to each other. Boyarin, however, uses his knowledge of Jewish and Christian documents and history to show that the transition from one to the other is not such a big jump. I like that fact that he constantly uses historical and literary documentation, followed by reasonable conclusions. He shows how supposedly unique Christian ideas were actually imbedded in Old Testament Scripture and early rabbinical teaching. He also describes how the early Christians still considered themselves Jews. Jesus did not go against the Torah, but against the additions to and misuse of the Torah that had crept into some influential Jewish groups of his day. Boyarin sees that some ideas that we take to be the most characteristically Christian, such as: the notion of a dual godhead with a Father and a Son, the notion of a Redeemer who himself will be both God and man, and the notion that this Redeemer will suffer and die as part of the salvation process"... "have deep roots in the Hebrew Bible and may be among some of the most ancient ideas about God and the world that the Israelite people ever held."

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