

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism  
Spring 2009  
Handout #4c (April 21, 2009)  
“The Jesus Movement”

### “renewal movement”

A scholarly term used to denote movements within Judaism during the Hasmonean and Herodian periods that aimed to correct the endemic state of covenant disloyalty among all Jews through spiritual (interiorized) reflection upon the meaning and significance of covenant duties.

### messianism

*messiah* = mašî(a)ḥ = “[one who has been] anointed [with oil]” (Greek: *christos*)

A belief that a divinely appointed agent of God will be sent to overturn the corrupt world order, and restore the [righteous] Jews to their rightful place and punish the wicked [unrighteous] who are currently in charge. Some messianic movements believed in a final battle (*messiah* as warrior, perhaps a descendant of King David); other movements believed divine intervention would restore the Jews under a messiah (perhaps a priestly descendant of Aaron).

### apocalypticism

*apocalypse* = apokalupsis = “unveiling” (Latin: *revelatio*)

A belief that the current world order is inverted (the wicked are on “top,” the righteous are on the “bottom”), and that only a dramatic intervention from God can restore this order by radically altering the current state of the world. Often the timeline of this radical alteration was *revealed* to a prophetic figure (or recorded in a parabiblical text to a figure from the Bible). Some apocalyptic movements were *eschatological*, others believed that the current world would continue existing but in such a radically altered state as to constitute an entirely new world order.

### eschatology

*eschatology* = eschatou logos = “discourse of the end [of the world]”

Discussion of the end of the world and the establishment of an entirely new world (either on earth or in a transcendent place), often predicated on the notion that the current world was drastically out of order (*apocalypticism*) and in need of divine repair. The end of the world might come in the form of a great battle, or a miraculous intervention by God.

### repentance/atonement

Hebrew: *t(e)šuva(h)* = “turning [back to God]”

atonement = at-one-ment [with God]

A belief that the covenant with God was in a state of disrepair caused by the ongoing sinful actions of the Jews; only sincere repentance for sins, performed individually and communally, could restore the rightful covenant relationship with God.

### baptism

*baptism* = baptismos = “dipping [in water]”

A ritual immersion in “living” (i.e., running) water, following upon the belief that the ongoing sinful state of the Jews resulted in a state of individual and communal impurity that could only be corrected a dramatic ritual cleansing, combined with sincere *repentance*.

## Messianic movements in the first century

### Simon of Peraea (4 BCE)

Sources: Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.57-59, *Antiquities of the Jews* 17.273-277; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9.2 (100s CE)

A slave of Herod the Great who claimed the kingship for himself at Herod's death and was put down by Herod Archelaus's troops; references to his actions during the revolt make it likely that he claimed some sort of messianic status.

### Judas the Galilean (6 CE)

Sources: Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.433, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1-10, 23; New Testament Acts

Considered by Josephus the founder of the “Zealots” (religious revolutionaries in Palestine), Judas led an open revolt against the Romans and client kings (tetrarchs). The messianic claims of his son (or grandson) Menahem during the Jewish War make such claims likely for Judas, as well.

### John the Baptist (late 20s CE)

Sources: New Testament Gospels; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.116-19

A preacher in the wilderness on the banks of the Jordan (southern Galilee) who called for the repentance of sins and perhaps preached the end of the world. Considered perhaps as a prophet or even a messiah by his contemporaries, John lived an ascetic life, emphasizing the interrelationship of physical ritual and internal state. He was executed by Herod Antipas around 30 CE for political disruption of Galilee.

### Theudas (mid-40s CE)

Sources: Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.97-98; New Testament Acts

Theudas led a group of followers to the River Jordan, which he promised to part; he was captured and executed by the Roman procurator.

### “The Egyptian” (mid-50s CE)

Sources: Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.259-263, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.169-171; New Testament Acts

Led a group of Jews to the Mount of Olives, from where he claimed he would lead them triumphantly into Jerusalem: he was stopped and he and his followers were killed by the Roman procurator.

For other “messianic claimants” into the fifth century, see [http://www.livius.org/men-mh/messiah/messianic\\_claimants00.html](http://www.livius.org/men-mh/messiah/messianic_claimants00.html)

## Sources for the life of Jesus

Gospels: Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Thomas, Peter

Josephus [?]

## Facts (?) of Jesus' ministry

† baptized by John;

† in Galilee: teaches repentance, debates purity, hailed as a miracle-worker, talks about the coming “kingdom”;

† in Jerusalem event: enters Jerusalem with his followers at Passover, and causes a disturbance at the Temple;

† execution: arrested, tried, and executed by the Roman governor (Pontius Pilate) by crucifixion

## Theories of the Historical Jesus

† *Apocalyptic prophet (eschatological or not)*

† *Cynic philosopher*

† *Marxist revolutionary*

† *Liberation theologian*