

THE LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM  
A RESTUDY OF THE ZACHARIAS PASSAGE

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The Gospels seem to contradict themselves on whether our Lord looked forward to an immediate fruition of the Kingdom of God upon the earth, or whether he expected his people to be overtaken with terrible calamities. The passage which, because of its presence in the Second Source, has most of all been cited to show that he foretold disasters is the Lament over Jerusalem. In Harnack's reconstruction it reads:

"Wherefore also the Wisdom of God said: I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them ye will slay and persecute; that there may come upon you all the blood shed upon the earth from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things will come upon this generation.

"O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! which killest the prophets and stonest those that are sent to her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate."<sup>1</sup>

—Mt. 23.34-38 = Lk. 11.49-51; 13.34f.

The concluding words too should be added:

"And I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

—Lk. 13.35b; cf. Mt. 23.39.

I. ZACHARIAH BEN JEHOIADA

Those who believe the prophecy to be genuine hold that the Zacharias whom Jesus had in mind was the son of Je-

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *Sayings of Jesus*, §33 and §43 = p. 269f.

hoiada, mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24. 18 ff.<sup>2</sup> They argue that other prophets, such as Jeremiah and some of his precursors, had foretold woes to Jerusalem that actually came to pass. Moreover, a century before Jesus the Testament of Levi warned the Hasmonean high-priests:

"Therefore the temple, which the Lord shall choose, shall be laid waste through your uncleanness, and ye shall be captives throughout all nations."

—T. Levi 15.1.

About 30 A.D. the great reorganizer of Judaism after the Fall of Jerusalem, Johannan b. Zakkai, foretold destruction of the Temple on the basis of Zechariah 11.7 (B. Yoma 39b).

Jesus is said to have summed up the crimes to be atoned for by citing the first and the last martyrs mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Martyrdom is the "theme song" of the closing chapters of Chronicles. The period it describes was memorable for many another execution, such as Jehoiakim's execution of the prophet Uriah (Jer. 26.20 ff), and the wholesale slaughters by Manasseh, of whom Josephus says,

<sup>2</sup> G. F. Moore, *Jour. Am. Oriental Soc.*, 1906, p. 317-323; John Chapman, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 13 (1911f), p. 398-410; cf. most commentaries, e.g. McNeile, p. 340 f; Allen, p. 250; Easton, p. 191; Plummer, p. 314; Strack and Billerbeck, I. 943; Zahn, *Kom. N.T.*, i (1922), 658f. According to Jerome, the Gospel of the Hebrews substituted "filium Joiadae," thereby affirming the designation.

"He killed all the righteous men among the Hebrews, nor did he spare even the prophets, some of whom he slaughtered daily, so that Jerusalem ran with blood."

—Ant. 10.3.1 (38).

By way of summary the martyr theme is found in the closing chapter:

"And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers . . . but they mocked the messengers of God and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people."

—2 Chr. 36.15-16.

The Zechariah passage is introduced with the words:

"Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto Jehovah; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear."

—24.19; cf. 25.15f; 28.9.

But one trouble with the notion that Jesus cited a character from Chronicles because Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Bible, is that *there was no last book in the Bible of his day*. The books of the Hagiographa were then copied on separate rolls, and so might be jumbled into most any order. As G. F. Moore aptly remarks, the typical explanation of the commentaries assumes that "the author of the Gospel had a Hebrew Bible made up like a Leipzig stereotyped edition"; actually in the lists of these writings Chronicles is sometimes mentioned first!<sup>3</sup>

An alternative theory advanced by Moore is that the Evangelist took the death of ben Jehoiada as "the typical example of the sacrilegious murder of a righteous man"; a choice motivated by the popularity of the story of his death in contemporary folk-lore. By stressing the symbolism, Moore seeks to

obviate the problem of the eight centuries which had intervened since his death.

But the incident becomes meaningless for the purpose to which Jesus is said to have employed it in view of the belief stressed in this same folk-lore that these crimes in the closing period of the Jewish kingdom had been fully expiated by the terrible chastisements at the hands of Nebuchadrezar. In particular, ben Jehoiada's martyrdom had been atoned for by a slaughter of "more than a million souls in all"; his blood, "seething and pulsating," awaited judgment two hundred and fifty-two years; thereafter it needed no more avenging.<sup>4</sup>

The martyrs whose deaths most of all required retribution were those who had perished from the days of the Maccabees. The legends cited by Moore belong to a later period when the two-fold threat of Gnosticism and Christianity forced studies into canonical channels. But prior to that threat the distinction between canon and apocrypha had been far less strict. Consequently, extra-canonical writings like 1 and 2 Maccabees and Enoch appear to have exercised more influence in the period prior to the fall of Jerusalem than did Chronicles.

The blood to be expiated included that of Onias III (2 Macc. 4.33-35; Enoch 90.8); the nameless women of 2 Macc. 6.10 f; the Hasids (Enoch 90.6-17; cf. 4 Ezra 8.27); the patriarch Eleazar (2 Macc. 6.18-31; 4 Macc. chs. 5-7); the Seven Brethren and their mother (2 Macc. ch. 7; 4 Macc. chs. 8-14). Vengeance awaited too for the victims of the Hasmonean priesthood (Bel. Jud.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 319, n. 2; cf. Nestle, *ZNTW* 6.199 f.

<sup>4</sup> Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, iv. 304; cf. p. 259; vi. 396; Strack and Billerbeck, i, 940 ff; Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 320 ff.

i. 81-98; Ant. xiii. 372-383) and of Herod the Great (Bel. Jud. i. 437 = Ant. xv. 41 ff; Bel. Jud. i. 648 ff = Ant. xvii. 149 ff).

A decisive reason for refusing the notion of ben Jehoiada to Jesus is the vividness with which the figure of his beloved master and friend, John the Baptist, dominated his thinking and motivated his activity. So impelling to him was that event that we should have expected him to say, "from the blood of Abel unto that of John."

The expression "from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zecharias" does seem to imply a time factor. There can be no justification for fixing the terminal point of the prophecy at eight centuries prior to the final consummation of history. The words, "Ye will slay and persecute" when placed on the lips of Jesus seem to look forward to future events and the "ye" refers to persons who are yet to participate in those events. Antiquity often sought to meet the difficulty by selecting the father of the Baptist as the Zacharias whom Jesus had in mind.<sup>5</sup> Others suggested that Zacharias ben Baruch who was slain in the First Rebellion. A few, and they include our First Evangelist, sought to lessen the time gap by naming the minor prophet, ben Berechiah.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Protev. Jacobi* 23 f; Origen, *Comm. Matt.*, in loc. (Migne XIII. 1630); cf. Moore, *op. cit.*, 318 f, n. 3. These legends of the death of John's father seem to derive from a notion that similarity of names should in some mysterious manner result in a similarity in their deaths. See, further, Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Lost "Book of the Nativity of John,"* 1929.

<sup>6</sup> See discussion by B. W. Bacon, "The Plaint of Wisdom" in *Expositor* viii. 10 (1915), 493-511; cf. Bultmann, *Gesch. syn. Trad.* (1921), p. 68 f and in Hans Schmidt, ed., *Eucharisterion* (1923), Forsch. R.L.A.N.T., 2. 6-11.

A modern way of avoiding the difficulty is to assume that Jesus was quoting a lost work entitled "The Wisdom of God."<sup>7</sup> There can be no doubt about the Wisdom character of the quotation, as it has many analogies; what is uncertain is whether we have to do with a specific writing or with someone who becomes the mouthpiece of divine Wisdom. In any case, a Wisdom saying sounds strange upon the lips of Jesus, for it suggests a background of Jewish Hellenism. That it comes from Greek-speaking circles is reinforced by the use it has made of the Septuagint of the ben Jehoiada passage: note, in particular, ἀλλή οἱ κυρίου (2 Chr. 24.21 LXX), and μεταξύ . . . καὶ τοῦ οἴκου (Luke 11.51); and the double sending προφήται καὶ ἄγγελοι (LXX), and προφήται καὶ ἀποστολοι (Q).

Against Jesus' use too is a viewpoint that seems to reflect the siege of Jerusalem. Then it was that the full measure of iniquity was expiated in devastating judgments. This impression is gathered from Matthew's words, "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers" (v. 32). The restraining of vengeance, until such a time as sin had reached a predetermined total, accords with an established doctrine Judaism (e.g. Gen. 15.16; Dan. 8.23; 2 Macc. 6.14; 1 Thess. 2.15). Inclusiveness of the martyrdoms is indicated in the words, "all the blood shed upon the earth."

The national catastrophe that could expiate such a vast measure of sin ap-

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Matt. 23.35 and Chrysostom; cf. composite figure in a Syriac manuscript at Union Theological Seminary, New York, which says of the Minor Prophet, "It was he whom Joash, king of Judah, killed upon the steps of the altar."—*Journ. Bib. Lit.*, June 1887, p. 34.

pears to have been in an advanced stage at the time of this oracle.

A further hint on the date is the theme of God's abandonment of the doomed city, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Mt. 23.38 = Lk. 13.35). The idea that a place without its protecting deity would be quickly overcome is common in antiquity. It is stated in the Old Testament with reference to Israel in Deut. 31.17; Isa. 2.5; Jer. 7.28; 12.7; 23.39, and more specifically to the Temple in Jer. 22.5. In Ezekiel 3.12 we can just see the gods rushing from the Temple and leaving the city to its doom. God's exodus in 2 Baruch 8.1f is associated with his act of abandoning Jerusalem to Titus:

"A voice was heard from the interior of the temple, after the wall had fallen, saying: 'Enter, ye enemies, And come, ye adversaries; For he who kept the house has forsaken (it).'"

According to Josephus:

"The priests on entering the inner court of the temple by night, as their custom was in the discharge of their ministrations, reported that they were conscious, first of a commotion and a din, and after that a voice as of a host, 'We are departing hence.'"

—Bel. Jud. vi. 299 f.

Similarly, Tacitus wrote,

"Of a sudden the doors of the shrine, opened and a super-human voice cried: 'The gods are departing': at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard."

—Hist. v. 13.<sup>s</sup>

In the mind of the author of our logion the Wisdom of God, who had brooded over the city like a hen over her chicks, is seen abandoning it because

<sup>s</sup> On false oracles during the siege, see S. E. Johnson, in *A. T. E.* 21 (1939), p. 205 f. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* ii. 351 f; Macrobius, *Sat.* iii. 9.

of its refusal to heed her gentle entreaties. She will not return again till at the Parousia (Mt. 23.39 = Lk. 13.35). "Wings of the Shekinah" is a common expression in Jewish literature of God hovering over his people: cf. Ps. 17.8; 36.7; 57.1; 61.4; 63.7; 91.4; Deut. 32.11; Ruth 2.12.

## II. ZACHARIAS BEN BARUCH

There is but one Zacharias known to history whose martyrdom answers to certain of the requirements of this passage, namely the ben Baruch of the First Rebellion.<sup>9</sup> Josephus says of him:

"The Zealots . . . had determined to put to death Zacharias, son of Baris, one of the most eminent of the citizens. The man exasperated them by his pronounced hatred of wrong and love of liberty. . . . Two of the most daring of them then set upon Zacharias and slew him in the midst of the Temple."

—Bel. Jud. iv. 5.4 (334–343).

Coming just before the destruction of the city his death would become a natural terminus for crimes to be expiated. Indeed it was so regarded by many commentators as long as notions about detailed forecasts allowed ascription to Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Matthew may have initiated the belief, as his "Zacharias, son of Barachia" finds readiest explanation in

<sup>9</sup> The *Bápeis* favored by MSS of Josephus, is presumably a corruption of *Bapaχίας*; there are several other variants also. See Niese, vol. vi, p. 391; Zahn, *Einleitung*, ii. 309.

<sup>10</sup> Calmet, writing about 1722, claimed "many learned commentators" had shared in this view, notably Grotius and Jansen. Others reported include: Hug, Osiander, Credner, Eichhorn, Bertholdt, Gfrörer, Baur, and Keim; cf. Fritzsche, *Evang. Matt.* (1826), p. 690 f; Meyer, *Matt.* (1884), p. 398. Chief modern advocates are Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evang.*, 2d ed. (1911), p. 118–123; Dobschütz, *Eschatology of the Gospels* (1910), p. 90n.

confusion with "Zacharias, son of Baris," or Baruch, victim of the Zealots. So far as we know the minor prophet died a natural death.

Voltaire, professing to refute taunts of sceptics, finds here apt fuel for his exquisite satire:

"There is not (say they) in Hebrew history any Zachary slain in the temple before the coming of the Messiah, nor in His time, but in the history of the siege of Jerusalem, by Josephus. . . . Hence they suspect that the gospel according to St. Matthew was written after the taking of Jerusalem by Titus. But every doubt, every objection of this kind, vanishes when it is considered how great a difference there must be between books divinely inspired and the books of men."<sup>11</sup>

To a number of scholars the damaging implications mentioned by Voltaire have been decisive for rejecting the theory of ben Baruch, inasmuch as they cannot concede the implied late date for the Second Source.<sup>12</sup> However the drift of studies in the Synoptic Problem has seemed to show that much of Q was amorphous and the Gospels in which this logion occurs to date not earlier than the reign of Domitian. Hence such secondary objections as are raised by Chapman and McNeile are the only ones that need concern us seriously.

1. We are told that a Christian writer could hardly have felt so deeply the death of ben Baruch unless this martyr had been a Christian, which obviously was not the case<sup>13</sup>. But the objectors forget that the Wisdom logion need not have been Christian. And, if it was, its natural place of origin was at Pella among Jacobean Christians who in their

conflicts with Paul had shown themselves more conscious of their union in the household of Israel than in that of Jesus. Hence the absence of known Christian martyrs in this general period, aside from James and John, is of small importance:<sup>14</sup> to the author of this logion every Pharisee rabbi who died protesting against the impiety of armed resistance, was as truly a martyr as if he had been a member of the Messianic synagogue. Of the companions of Johanna b. Zak-kai, many appear to have perished at this time; he himself escaped only by being smuggled out of Jerusalem in a coffin.

2. We are told that ben Baruch could not have qualified among the "prophets and wise men and scribes." It is indeed true that his "pronounced hatred of wrong and love of liberty" (Bel. Jud. iv. 335) might have been considered less a mark of being God's messenger than the warning of judgment by ben Jehoiada. But the same issue might be raised of Abel, and of many an unnamed witness for righteousness whose blood was to be avenged. Moreover, choice of ben Baruch has little to do with the comparative degree in which he qualified as member of one of these three categories of messengers: the focus is not on the man himself but on the terminus of time.

3. "Unless Zacharias was a priest on duty," what was he doing "between the temple and the altar?"<sup>15</sup> This objection of Chapman, repeated by McNeile, is invalidated by the fact that the balance of probability points to ben Baruch having been a member of the priesthood. That conclusion follows from the description of him by Josephus

<sup>11</sup> Voltaire, *Works*, Du Mont ed. (1901), vol. vii, p. 107 f.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. John Chapman, *op. cit.*, and McNeile, *St. Matthew*, p. 339 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>14</sup> For contrary opinion, *ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403 f.

as "one of the most eminent citizens" and that "he was also rich": qualities which applied to few aside from the priesthood. Moreover, the words "between the temple and the altar" have their origin less in historical fact than in an effort to embellish the enormity of the murder. Nor of the earlier Zacharias is it said he was killed "between the temple and the altar": the designation is, "in the court of the house of Jehovah," which is matched by the "ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ἱεροῦ" for ben Baruch (Bel. Jud. iv. 343).

4. Again, we are told that the author of the logion could not have had in mind ben Baruch because the very class of persons who died with him at this time are those against whom Jesus is made to speak so bitterly.<sup>16</sup> But the alternative choice of ben Jehoiada offers a similar anomaly: though he was a priest, his martyrdom was expiated by the slaughter of an immense number of priests. The Bible offers many examples of such a shift in the target. To the textual critic there is no more valued means for disentangling the sources.

5. Chapman experiences "grave difficulty" in supposing that Luke and Matthew ascribed to Jesus a prophecy they knew he had never spoken. But surely it is unfair to judge them by modern standards. They sincerely believed that their Lord was still speaking, and though out of sympathy with the Goëtist extremes of the Fourth Gospel, never hesitated to make him author of ideas they believed worthy for him to have spoken.

### III. A COMPOSITE ORACLE

But the case for ben Baruch would be invalidated if Jesus himself had

quoted an ancient oracle and if the two portions of the logion can be isolated as in Luke.

Actually, our Lord is indeed represented as quoting from an apocryphal writing, "The Wisdom of God." Spitta suggests that it was the midrash on Kings mentioned in 2 Chr. 24.27.<sup>17</sup> Because the martyrdom of Zacharias is the terminus of sins to be expiated the oracle must have been written prior to a new crop of martyrdoms and, if not as early as Spitta alleges, at least prior to Maccabean times. The words that follow in Mt. 23.36—Lu. 11.51b, "and I say unto you" would then be understood as the comment that Jesus is alleged to have made on this ancient oracle.

But there are several difficulties in assuming that our Lord himself is citing the passage. Such a formal quotation does not seem to suit him; it is especially hard to ascribe it to him as a part of the heated controversy with his opponents. Again, the ascribing to him of a Wisdom passage is suspicious, inasmuch as from the dawn of the Christian movement he himself was considered an incarnation of the Wisdom of God. There are certain similarities to Matthew 11.28–30, where too gracious Wisdom is pleading with her rebellious children whom she would gather under her protecting wings that they might find rest for their afflicted souls. Least of all is it easy to impute to Jesus the idea that God traps men into sin so as to punish them: that doctrine, which was familiar

<sup>17</sup> Fr. Spitta, *Die synoptische Grundschrift* . . . (1912), p. 334. The Wisdom source appears to have been first noticed by Hengel (Amst. 1824); its significance was developed by David Strauss. Harnack thinks Jesus himself is quoting it—*op. cit.*, p. 103; John Chapman suggests he is paraphrasing Prov. 1. 21–30—*op. cit.*, p. 409 f.

<sup>16</sup> Bel. Jud., iv. 333; McNeile, p. 340.

to the Deuteronomist (2 Sam. 24.1; cf. Ezek. 20.25 f), and probably survived to the time of the Chronicler, seems to be implicit in this logion.<sup>18</sup> Dissociating the words from Jesus disposes also of the problem of why he should go to the past for his symbolical martyr when his thoughts were on the Baptist whose death threatened to be the prototype of his own (Mk. 6.16 with Lu. 13.31).

Nor is it easy to separate the concluding half of the logion as Luke has done, but which must be jettisoned if anything is to be saved at all as genuine words of Jesus. Streeter's argument against the amputation<sup>19</sup> seems to be covered above. Against Streeter is the overwhelming consensus of scholarship which finds in this passage one of those rare instances where Matthew is right and Luke wrong.<sup>20</sup> Jerusalem here is presupposed in full view of the speaker; the words of the first part fit admirably with those of the second, and the phrase, "how often would I have gathered thy children," though hard to reconcile with

what is known of Jesus' mission is appropriate if Wisdom is still the speaker.

Thus we arrive at a contradiction, with the first and second halves composed centuries apart and yet the whole giving an appearance of unity.

The solution we propose is that the second part is a midrash on the first. Some church prophet, perhaps in the Jacobean community at Pella had seen in the death of Zacharias ben Baruch of 68 A.D. an antitype to that of ben Jehoiada of the ancient oracle. Since Jesus was believed to be himself the Wisdom of God, it was but natural to make him spokesman for the entire logion. Though there had been a temporary suspension of his gracious ministry, both in the flesh and as entreating Wisdom, at the Parousia he would be manifested once more. That sure promise was offered as consolation to hearts broken by the catastrophe, and the expiatory character of these events fitted them into God's divine purpose.

Thus the historical Jesus who wept over Jerusalem must be sought from the time of the First Rebellion, rather than in the person of our Lord. This later Jesus was a farmer. The son of a certain Ananus, he went about crying, "Woe, woe, to Jerusalem." Josephus pictures him as beginning his wail about 61 A.D. and continuing it "seven years and five months" until he was killed by a stone from a Roman catapult (Bel. Jud. vi. 300-309).

The logion takes its place with Luke 21.20-36, which likewise, as Vincent Taylor has so ably shown, was "a cry from the siege."<sup>21</sup> Thus no exception is to be made to the outlook of Jesus as one looking forward to the glorious triumph of the Kingdom of God within the living experience of his auditors.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew* (1939), p. 192 f.

<sup>19</sup> B. H. Streeter, in Sanday, ed., *Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (Oxf. 1911), p. 153, 162-4; cf. V. Taylor, *Behind the Third Gospel* (1926), p. 155; P. Micklem, *St. Matthew* (Lond. 1917), p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Wellhausen, *Das Ev. Lucas* (1904), p. 76; J. M. Creed, *St. Luke* (1930), p. 187; Plummer, *St. Luke* (1896), p. 351; B. S. Easton, *St. Luke* (1926), p. 224; B. Weiss, *Quellen des Lukasev.* (1907), p. 98; H. K. Luce, *Camb. Bible: St. Luke* (1936), p. 149; B. T. D. Smith, *Camb. Bible: St. Matt.* (1933), p. 137; H. U. W. Stanton, *St. Matthew* (1919), p. 583; McNeile, p. 340 f; Loisy, *Ev. Syn.* (1908), ii. 383. W. Manson, *The Gospel of Luke* (1930), p. 169 f; Montefiore, *Syn. Gospels* (1927), ii. 305. Cf. the verdict of Bacon, "On all the principal points" of reconstruction . . . "Harnack is right and Streeter hopelessly wrong." —"the Plaint of Wisdom," *Expositor* viii. 10 (1915), 494.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent Taylor, in *Journ. Theol. Studies*, 26 (1925), p. 136-144.

