

Jesus and Empire. Richard Horsley

The Kingdom of God and the New World Order.

(Fortress. 2003.)

Depoliticising Jesus – like discussing MLK without black history

1. Assume religion is separate from politics and economics
2. Modern Western individualism
3. Scholarly interpreters not historically attuned
4. Seeing sayings independently makes Jesus a ‘talking head’.

Yeshua ben Hananiah prophesied doom to Jerusalem but he was freed by Rome and allowed to wander. Yeshua ben Yoseph crucified! Why? Because he was not in conflict with ‘Judaism’ (did not exist anyway) but Rome!

Israelite-derived people: no ‘Jews’.

Galileans, Samaritans, Judeans, but ruled over by Rome through war lords.

Roman Imperialism

Persians cultivated local elites but Hellenic empire ‘westernised’ under

Antiochus – “different from all the beasts that preceded it” Dan 7:7

Maccabean Revolt. Just as Antiochus was to defeat them, Rome invaded.

Rome beat Carthage (Hannibal) 146 BC and went on to annihilate cities and took over Greek Empire – destroyed Corinth (Julius C later populated it with plebs and ruffians from Rome)

Cicero spoke up for *Imperium* as provider of economic benefits as well as political. **63 BC Pompey** beat Hasmoneans and penetrated Holy of Holies placing Hyrcanus (Hasm) as High Priest with whole country under tribute.

Hasmonean High Priests accommodated to Seleucid Empire.

53 BC two Hasmonean factions erupted Cassius crucified 30K at Magdala.

40 AD Herod (son of Antipater) named as puppet King and est. in **37**.

After Roman Civil War Octavian beat Anthony in **31 BC as Augustus**.

New World Order: coinage Image of the Globe – boundaries of Empire.

He was Saviour, establishing Pax. Held empire together not with bureaucrats but Emperor Cult and festivals. Wheat imports to Rome 400K tons/annum.

Terror was Roman way. Crucifixion of political 'bandits'.

General revolt subdued by **Varus 4BC 2K crucified** (Sepphoris & Emmaus)

Pontius Pilate smuggled effigies (standards) of Caesar into Temple. Humiliatn

Herod's 37 years: Judean, Galilean and Samaritan had lived under one authority - Hasmonean High Priest. Now it was threefold to

Rome, Herod & Temple State. (Tribute, Tax, and Tithe)

Buildings: Sebaste (Gk for Augustus) at Samaria and Ceasarea Maritima.

High Priests built mansions to North West of Jm. by creating estates.

Archelaus (son of Herod) seeks succession oppressively in Jerusalem.

Antipas (son to Herod) Sepphoris and Tiberias - first ruler to live in Galilee.

RESISTANCE AND REBELLION IN JUDEA & GALILEE

4 BC On Herod Gt's death Judas leads attack by villages on Sepphoris

66AD Jerusalemites ransack HPriests mansion.

132 AD despite reprisals Simon bar Kokhba (Messiah) revolts.

Scribes mediators for patrons (high priests). Became self-reliant guardians of Judean Great Tradition - scrolls lodged in Temple (to become part of Tanach!)

Galilean peasants' rôle to render tribute, tax & tithe; villagers' tradition emphasised popular leaders (Elijah) and covenant justice.

Qumran: left Hasmoneans to it and formed new Exodus in Desert.

Romans were the Sons of Darkness (the *Kittim*)

Pharisees: 6K refused oath to Caesar & destroyed Herod's Temple eagle.

Fourth Philosophy: like Pharisees plus freedom teaching.

Sicarii: intellectuals assassinated from inside. No powerbase.

HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

Class & Regional Divisions: Huge chasm of wealth and privilege; and Galilee from Judea and Samaria.

Galilee under Jerusalem for century before Jesus, separate during his life.

Social Forms: villages governed by Knesset assembly (Grk synagogue) led by village elders. Ordinary village jealousies escalate under pressure?

Illiterate but culturally aware to 'minor tradition'- stories, laws, customs, prayers etc. cultivated in oral communication. Moses, Joshua, Saul & David. Cultivated economic cooperation & covenantal relations – vs interest, lending.

No reason to think they knew the great tradition (which eventually became Tanach)

'Meaning' is performance of relationship of hearers to the tradition, not reflection on text. (cf. 'I have a dream')

Mark is story of Jesus renewing Israel whilst condemning Israeli rulers and their Roman patrons: renewal and Judgement go together in Kingdom

QUELLE

Not a collection of sayings but speech sequence on Kingdom as renewal of Israel. KgdM offered to poor – sharing and debt cancellation. He will baptize with purging Fire of judgement on rulers. ('call selves Sons of Abraham' – wealthy genealogies) Begins with Jn Baptist (he will use purging fire) and ends with Jesus declaring twelve judges over Israel. The great banquet – wealthy (two oxen, two fields) turn away; poor and lame inherit.

Chapter 4

God's Judgement f Roman Imperial Order

No Judean text believes end of world or cosmic catastrophe.

Tradition of judgement on Kings in OT. Kings had killed prophets!

In scribal-scholarly circles: God would intervene to judge empire and give people independent sovereignty – some texts talk of Kingdom of God.

In Daniel 7 dominion given to people of the holy ones of the Most High. One like a Son of Man – God is only king. (Maccabees, Qumran, etc)

Jesus attacks Temple – disrupts its normal life. Quotes Isaiah & Jeremiah!

Then talks of "faith to move this mountain." Temple without hands is the new people of Israel

Root conflict is not between Judaism and Christianity but rulers and ruled.

Render to Caesar: God is only King!

Exorcisms: Since land was dominated contrary to promise, then superhuman forces must keep it in thrall. "Have you come to destroy us?" He not only

throws out but 'banishes'. 'My name is Legion' to enter pigs back into sea which brought them. (cf Roman *Kittim* of Qumran)

Chapter 5

COVENANTAL COMMUNITY & COOPERATION

Roman rulers and lackeys already condemned by God (engizo).

Jesus therefore: heals effects of empire, summons people to rebuild community life, pressing programme to re-establish egalitarian social-economic relations in the village communities which were basic social form.

HEALS EFFECTS OF EMPIRE

1. Expels Alien Occupying forces. 'My name is Legion'.
2. Heals the Social Body. Woman and girls of 12 years.
3. Instils Hope: Blessed those who mourn. Sins are forgiven. Harvest!
4. Counters disintegration: Temple-Corban no, covenant 'honour your parents' yes. Liberal divorce laws (helpful to wealth consolidation) no, those who obey God's word are his family, yes.

WORKS FOR VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Deliberately attends village Knesset/synagogue where business and prayers would hold community together through self-governance. He deals with communities not just individuals.

Mission Discourses (Mark 6:7-13, Q 9:57-10:16)

Peace and healing for all, or calling down divine judgement. Remain in village for period as community organisers – villages getting their act together.

They were struggling communities which he addresses.

RENEWS COVENANTAL COMMUNITIES

Mosaic covenant was a 'constitution'.

Final six kept egalitarian and sustainable community. Honour parents, killing, adultery, stealing, false witness vs neighbour, coveting neighbour.

Lev was practised in Jesus time! (Hillel's Prosbul tried to stack in favour of landowners; and Josephus reports how Lev code worked in famine and Roman levy of tribute). Qumran also hallowed desert covenant.

Lord's Prayer – 'subsistence bread, cancel debt; Kingdom = your will be done'.

Last Supper uses blood of covenant sign as with Sinai.

Mark 7:13 – Pharisees preach traditions of elders, not commandment of God!

Thus Sermon on the Mount:

1. Sets out covenantal deliverance – Blessed are poor, yours is Kingdom.
2. Must return to mutuality – Love your enemies; share with neighbours; embarrass creditor by giving cloak and underclothes.
3. Social interaction healed – do not judge
4. Lists inner qualities required.

This is a covenant for resistance: without solidarity and mutual aid, peasants would be turned into sharecroppers economically dependent on rulers.

Dialogues in Mark 10.

Family: integrity of marriage and family is key issue in peasant society.

Kingdom belongs to children – not the wealthy rulers.

Mark 10:17-31 is statement of egalitarian covenantal economics.

The only way to become wealthy (rich young man) was to take non-covenantal advantage of vulnerable. His 'eternal life' question is luxury, Js concerned about here and now. Difficult for rich to enter Kingdom.

Mark 10:32-45 is statement of egalitarian politics

'on his right and his left' is given to the 'bandits' at crucifixion, also executed by Romans. No political rulers in village covenant communities. Leaders serve.

He calls them to take control of their lives in a social revolution.

Love meant to create concrete economic practices in village communities.

EPILOGUE: CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

Soon after death/resurrection his followers called him Christ – king.

Mark sees Jesus going ahead into Galilee. Luke sees it in Acts 4. Paul recognises no slave/free, male/female. Builds anti-Imperial movement of alternative societies based on local communities. He links them together.

Euangelion was good news of Caesar's victories. Augustus asked for *Pistis* in himself as *Kyrios*. He was to be honoured in *ecclesiai* assemblies in cities.

BUT

Paul begins to build a pyramid of power. Deutero-Pauline letters are patriarchal. Luke blames Jews to get Empire off hook. Constantine uses faith to authorise empire. Canon of NT (and OT) determined by imperial order.

Roman globalisation was political and military. USA is economic.
'Globalisation' was American-sponsored but now US is its enforcer.

cf. Nicaraguan revolutionaries, Islamic anti-USA after USA-Shah ousted.