

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY: #30

REVENGE

OF THE

PHIABIS:

The Jubilee Armada

The Lost History of The Church

By Olaf H. Hage III

Terror from the Fire of Rome changed how the Phiabis viewed Christianity. What had been a violent political rivalry with the family of Jesus about inheritance rights became a fanatic religious witch-hunt driven by the Phiabis' own spiritual delusions.

As we know, in the spring of A.D. 64, Peter and John Mark advanced on Rome and Alexandria because of a revelation that was given to them. (McBirnle 1973, p. 255) That "revelation" appears to have been the prophecy about the destruction of a corrupt city known as Babylon the Great, but they were unsure which city was this evil persecutor of God's people, the city ruling over kings on seven hills with a large seaport. If the Apostles had been fully confident it was Rome, they would not have felt a need to also warn Alexandria. Clearly, they did not know which city was Babylon the Great.

True, Rome with its port of Ostia was an obvious candidate, but so was the world's great seaport, Alexandria. Likewise, the prophet-persecuting city of Jerusalem was linked with the world's newest seaport at Caesarea. All three cities sit on seven hills, as did ancient Babylon itself. All four of those cities had large Jewish and Christian populations. All ruled over other kingdoms directly or indirectly. All were filled with corruption. And all were great merchant capitals handling massive trade in the goods of the day. Even Antioch in Syria might be a candidate. So, who should they warn first?

Peter and John Mark made a decision. They chose to carry their Revelation to Rome first. They learned that the High-Priest-in-exile, Ishmael ben Phiabi, and his son Hilkiah (the Temple Treasurer whose thugs extorted tithes from the priests) were under house arrest at the estate of Nero's wife Poppea outside the city. The two Apostles felt they had to warn both Jews and Christians (Romans 2:9-10, Revelation 18:4-24). Peter and John Mark felt these two chief men

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of the Jews had to be consulted first, before warning the Jews in Rome itself (*cf.* Paul's similar situation in *A.D.* 61: Acts 28:16-31, esp. verse 17).

Poppaea's pseudo-messianic baby notwithstanding, John Mark's qualifications for receiving the Revelation included Messianic descent on both sides. He was a royal heir of all four chief tribes: He was a priest of Levi, a prince of Judah and the Davidic line, an official scribe of Benjamin, and a prophet of Joseph (*cf.* Revelation 1:6,19; 10:11).

It is doubtful Poppaea realized who John Mark was. But Ishmael and Hilkiyah, who knew the Levitical and Messianic families, if only for tithing purposes, would have understood that John Mark's bloodlines gave him the qualifications to be an authoritative prophet of Israel. To Ishmael and Hilkiyah, John Mark, an advocate for Christianity and the claims of the House of David was supremely dangerous to the House of Phiabi. They wanted him silenced and legally executed, so that his writings could be blotted out (at least for 30 years).

His prophecies proved to be worse than they expected. John Mark had brought with him visions of what seemed like global doom, and he described these vivid images with inspired innocence before the horrified eyes of Ishmael and Hilkiyah.

Mark's presentation would have taken place in late June or early July of *A.D.* 64, just days before the fire. We can be confident of the timing because the fire broke out on the 18th of July, but Jews and Christians had not yet fled the city. It follows that the warnings had been given by Peter and John Mark only a few days in advance of the fire, and people were just starting to gather their belongings together and warn their loved ones to prepare. The night the fire broke out, Nero rushed back to the city and ordered the gates sealed shut, presumably to force people to stay and help fight the blaze, but probably also to trap any arsonists. (Tacitus 1977, VX: 39) No accounts of the fire mention anyone escaping either before the fire or after it began.

Ishmael and Hilkiyah would have been torn between two reactions: Either John Mark was a true prophet of God, which meant that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, or else Mark had been driven mad by a dangerous demonic spirit. They felt their only option was to view Mark as an evil madman. The alternative would require them to surrender all hope of regaining power in Jerusalem and instead humble themselves to being ordinary Christians subject to the same persecution they themselves had once imposed.

We know which course the Phiabis chose. The two priests may have listened quietly to the young prophet, but inwardly they thought he had to be demon-possessed in order to entertain such horrific visions. Their rage against Mark would only have grown more intense as each frightening prophecy was set before them. And, if Mark had dared voice his suspicion that Jerusalem itself might be Babylon the Great, the two Phiabi priests would surely have cursed him for libeling what they considered to be God's Holy City.

After Peter and Mark left, the Phiabis must have been greatly troubled. They would have puzzled over what to do. Peter had surely urged them to warn Jewish people to flee Rome. But Ishmael was no fool. He could see that if he were to order the Jews to flee and a fire did indeed destroy Rome, Nero would infer that Ishmael had known about an imminent arson and failed to

disclose it. Or worse, Nero might assume Ishmael had ordered his people to commit arson against the city. So, Ishmael would not warn his people to flee. The Jews of Rome had to be sacrificed to the flames, if necessary, to prevent Nero from blaming Ishmael and the House of Phiabi for any fire that might erupt.

Still, it was not enough to avoid Nero's notorious wrath. Ishmael needed to divert it from himself and his people and toward an alternative target. If a fire did break out, after this prophecy from John Mark, then it would be a golden opportunity to get the Romans to do what the Phiabis had thus far been unable to do: Destroy the royal line of the House of David and its Christian followers. And Rome would get the blame for it.

It is worth noting that the Empire did in fact adopt both of these objectives. Apostolic Spirit-filled Christianity was indeed all but wiped out by the fifth century. And the hunting down and extermination of the House of David, first ordered by the Emperor Vespasian in *A.D.* 71, was (supposedly) achieved by the seventh century. Or at least, these are the criminal acts some Catholic historians have admitted the Byzantine Empire committed, with the blessing of certain Roman popes. (M. Martin 1981, pp. 41-44)

All Ishmael needed for his hopes to be fulfilled was the fire. Was Ishmael willing to start such a fire? Probably not. He feared Nero too much to encourage outright arson.

Of course, in those days Rome was a wooden fire-trap, with closely-packed tenements covering much of the city. The fire started among shops at the southern end of the Circus Maximus. (Tacitus 1977, XV: 38) These shops were closest to the Jewish Quarter and near where Jewish merchants likely bordered jealous pagan competitors.

Fortunately, the wind was blowing away from the Jewish quarter, sparing it almost totally. Perhaps God was sparing the Jews whose leaders were unwilling to protect them. Or perhaps God was sparing the Christians who lived among them. Many Christians in Rome were former Jews who still resided in the Jewish Quarter with their families. The wind could have turned back on the Jews, yet it blew more or less steadily toward the patrician sector for nine days. (Tacitus 1977, XV: 39-40) In spite of modern suspicions to the contrary, it would seem that the sparing of the Jewish Quarter had more to do with divine providence than any conspiracy.

Here is what may have happened: The fire began accidentally late on July 18th during a nearly full moon. Ishmael and Hilkiyah were no doubt asleep when one of Poppaea's night-servants, keeping watch, first shouted, "Fire!" There was a commotion throughout the estate as more and more people awakened and began to scurry about. Having no fire department to summon, Poppaea's servants were trained to respond immediately, sounding the estate's fire bell, going to the well to fill vessels of water, calming the animals, rousing their mistress, and so on. If the wind shifted, the estate might be threatened. A glowing ember could alight at any time. Extreme vigilance was required, especially during daylight, when the initial ember was almost impossible to see.

Ishmael and Hilkiyah gathered nervously with Poppaea and Josephus and her other guests at some high vantage point on a balcony or a rooftop and stood staring at the reddish orange glow

rising from Rome in the distance. They shivered slightly in the oddly cool night breeze blowing in off the sea. Their shivers intensified when they heard loud cracking sounds, the terrifying screams of women and children, the bleating shrieks of horses, or the occasional trumpet signal.

Subtle shifts in the breeze began to waft entrails of smoke and the stench of burning flesh into their nostrils. A putrid taste like vomit itched down their throats as their eyes burned. Gradually, messengers from the city, terrified faces blackened with soot, coughed up news about which districts had been the latest to be consumed.

The count of the dead ceased, no doubt at Nero's orders, for no mention of the dead has survived the event, even though we have such totals for many other disasters of that time. We know far more about deaths during the Christian persecutions and the Piso Conspiracy trials, even though Nero later issued edicts suppressing discussions of those slaughters. We can only imagine that the number of people being burned alive in Rome must have been horrendous. Screams from the burning would have been heartrending.

That first night of fire sucked the breath from the Phiabis. Exhausted, they tried vainly to sleep during the acrid day of the nineteenth, occasionally getting up to look at the smoke cloud over the city as it trailed away to their left, toward the Apennine hills. It was one of those rare times when protocol collapsed and slave and patrician stood side by side in their nightclothes, too scared to rest, sharing a common dread.

By the second night, they realized the fires were not being extinguished. The furnace of flame would have to burn itself out. Nero ordered the destruction of whole blocks of shabby tenements adjacent to his friend Ofonius Tigellinus' estate. The two had long wanted to tear down these eyesores, and the fire gave them the excuse they sought.

After six days, the flames lusted in vain for flesh and wood, but found none to ravish within their grasp. That night the haunted fire-glow faded and Ishmael and Hilkiyah succumbed to their first real sleep in a week. But the next day, the alarm bell was rung again. For three more days Rome burned, now with a different nightly hue as marble burned instead of wood. Most of the city, except for the Jewish district, was devoured. Ishmael and Hilkiyah did not know it, but the ancient relics and records of pagan religion were perishing as the temples that housed them were consumed. That loss of the tangible remnants of paganism would eventually help Christianity triumph in the Empire.

Living off figs and nuts, lacking kosher food, and traumatized by the fires and the fatigue of fear, Ishmael and Hilkiyah nervously pondered their fate. (Josephus 2014, ¶3) Would they be restored to power? Or would they have to become merchants, supplying kosher items to exiles, now that they realized how hard it was to maintain their ritual purity? Or, would they instead be burned alive by a furious Emperor seeking victims to blame? Was Nero even alive? Would the Empire collapse? Could Rome ever be rebuilt?

Word arrived that Nero was alive. Alarmed, Ishmael and Hilkiyah are thought to have begged Poppaea to urge her husband to direct his rage against the Christians. (Benko 1984, p. 20) (Blond 2000, p. 158) They would surely have blamed the prophet John Mark. The Talmud

documents that Ishmael's family thereafter insisted Christians were dangerous demonic magicians whose spiritual contagion must be stopped. Poppaea relayed Jewish fears to Nero, who faced rumors that he had set the fires. (Benko 1984, p. 20) News that Christian prophets foretold the fires fell on fertile soil. Nero promptly ordered all Christians in Rome to be seized, tortured for information, and burned alive as arsonists or "haters of mankind" (=prophets of doom). (Tacitus 1977, XV: 44)

The eyewitness Tacitus said Nero executed "an immense multitude" of Christians, no small claim after many thousands of Romans perished in the fires. (Tacitus 1977, XV: 44) But something made Nero spare John Mark. Nero may have calculated that John Mark was more useful alive than dead. What might have made him think this?

Nero could have been told that John Mark was a prominent person of the House of David, a key Christian leader, and a son of a Levitical or priestly line. Moreover, John Mark was one of the primary heirs to the huge fortunes of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two of the wealthiest men in the Roman world. By *A.D.* 64, Joseph was in hiding in Britain, and Nero was desperate to find money to pay for the massive rebuilding of Rome. Nero might have hoped to use John Mark as ransom to get his hands-on Joseph's wealth. Nicodemus was probably dead by then, but his son Lazarus was not. John Mark's great-grandmother Mary Magdalene was the sister of Lazarus. The tithe-collecting Hilkiyah surely knew all the tempting details about the lines of inheritance. But it was too much for Poppaea to relay; Hilkiyah may have told Nero in person.

So, Nero's need for money could have played a role in preserving John Mark's life. But Nero probably had no idea that Joseph of Arimathea had already spent his fortune ransoming his family from Herod Antipas, or that Lazarus was hard at work on Cyprus, hiring the Levites of Salamis to make dozens of copies of the New Testament. There may have been other members of the family of Nicodemus still in Jerusalem, but they were not Christians, so far as we know. Had Nero known all this, he might well have executed John Mark at the same time he crucified Peter. But, such information was not necessarily available to Hilkiyah as Treasurer of the Temple.

Even so, Nero managed to amass the money to rebuild Rome in breathtaking time. He may have seemed a fool, but he was truly an insane genius. Within weeks, Nero had hired thousands of slaves to move astonishing mounds of stone to the city. He planned to make Rome as fireproof as possible. Almost overnight, the haphazard streets of rubble were replaced by a new formal grid as Nero's architects redesigned the city, literally from the ground up. One who had been absent a year would not have been able to orient himself by anything familiar. In less than three years a whole new Rome stood amid the ashes of the ancient capital of the Empire. Only in the Jewish Quarter would one be able to see unbroken remnants of the city that had formerly ruled the Imperial world.

Ishmael and Hilkiyah had been stunned when John Mark's prophecy about the fire came true so promptly. His prophecy had warned of a double-dose of divine wrath upon Babylon, and sure enough, a day after the initial fire had seemed to die out, it suddenly restarted and swept through all the luxurious parts of Rome, burning marble and stone, as if by magic. It took palaces and mansions as it destroyed the relics of pagan religion in the city. The fire outflanked

all efforts to suppress it, as if the city had been consumed by a fiery spirit with a mind of its own. If the Phiabis had hoped to dismiss this as coincidence, their hopes would fail when the new "fire-proof" Rome was struck by a second major fire in *A.D.* 80, under the Emperor Titus, sixteen years after the first blaze.

Of course, the Phiabis might have assumed these fires were started by Christian arsons. But there is a reason to think they attributed the fires to "witchcraft." That is, they may have believed John Mark caused the fires by using "demonic magical powers."

Such views were compatible with primitive pagan superstitions that, if someone believed in a fire erupting, then such belief itself would magically and inexorably create that fire. In fact, the pagan paranoia that Christian prophecy magically caused plagues and famines became a motivating factor behind Roman persecutions.

This paranoid delusion has recently resurfaced among naïve people frightened by Christian prophecy. They are scared that Christians will magically cause the prophecies of Revelation to come true simply by our belief in them. But Christian faith is in God's Word, not in some non-existent magical ability to start fires with our own minds. That's a childish superstition. (*cf.* I Kings 18:20-39, Matthew 4:1-11, 10:16, Revelation 13:10, *etc.*).

Yet, Ishmael's family did in fact adopt the explanation of "witchcraft" to explain not only Christian prophecies, but also Christian miracles of all kinds. (The Pharisees in Jesus' time argued that Jesus cast out demons under the authority of Beelzebub, a high-ranking demon. See Matthew 12:24, Mark 3:22, and Luke 11:15) In a moment, we will quote Talmudic sources to document this. And we will tie this directly to the teaching of Ishmael's grandson and most powerful heir, his namesake, Ishmael ben Elisha, a High Priest who was executed by Rome *circa A.D.* 135. (E. L. Martin 2000, p. 314, from Vilnay: see n423)

It appears that after his prophecies had seemed to come true, Mark's Revelation warning to Jewish leaders of Rome led directly to the Phiabi's charging Christianity with witchcraft. Here's why: Coptic tradition insists that John Mark performed many miracles, probably including healings, while he was in Cyrene. (McBirnle 1973, p. 255) This was at the very same time when Ishmael was being visited there by his son Elisha, who had certainly heard of Mark's miracles, if not witnessed some of them in person.

Christians saw these miracles as gifts of the Holy Spirit (See I Corinthians 12:28-29). But after hearing his father's nightmarish tales of Mark prophesying the fires of Rome, the impressionable young Elisha viewed Mark's actions as magic and witchcraft by demonic power.

Mark's miracles caused many Jews in Cyrene to convert to Christianity. (McBirnle 1973, p. 255) More than 100,000 conversions may have occurred in this one city. That horrified Elisha. The evangelical success of John Mark among his fellow Jews would have strengthened Elisha's determination to eliminate, not only John Mark, but also all Spirit-filled Christians, especially those who had converted from Judaism and were still living inside Jewish communities where they might "infect" Jewish neighbors. Purifying Judaism of these "demonic" influences became Elisha's life-long obsession.

Such paranoia about Christian conversion efforts had been previously voiced by the Sanhedrin and the High Priests as one of their prime justifications for targeting Jesus:

But some of them (who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead) went individually to the Pharisees, and told them what things (miracles) Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees summoned together a Council (the whole Sanhedrin was called into a special session because of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead) and said, "What can we do? For this man (in actual fact) does many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all will believe in him (Jesus' fame was spreading like a contagion) and the Romans will come (with a great army) and take away (destroy) both our Holy Place and our (whole) nation." And one of them, named Caiaphas, being High Priest that same year, said unto them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you realize that it is expedient for us that one man die for the people so that the whole nation not perish. And this he spoke not of himself, but being High Priest that year, he had prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. And (the Apostle John interjects his own view here in agreement with what he felt Caiaphas meant) not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad (apparently a reference to the rest of Israel). Then from that day forth, they (daily) took counsel together in order to put Him to death. (Caiaphas had convinced them that this was actually God's will, and note that John seems to agree, albeit not with their selfish motives in seeking to cling to their own power and prestige in Jerusalem.) Jesus therefore, walked no more openly among the Judeans (apparently having been tipped off by Joseph of Arimathea, His spy on the Council), but went from there into a country close to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued (remained in hiding) with His disciples. (John 11:46-54)

Here we note several key points. First, Jesus had a spy on the Sanhedrin who warned Him that they were about to arrest Him. So, Jesus went into hiding, but not for long. He returned six days before the Passover. It was not His intention to avoid His destiny, but to make sure His crucifixion took place at the right time. The Apostle Thomas, that is, Joseph of Arimathea, had tipped him off, but when he later buried Jesus, he lost faith, which was only revived by touching the risen Christ (John 20:24-29).

Second, the Jewish leaders believed in miracles and that included the miracles of Jesus. Even Caiaphas himself prophesied, and John believed that his prophecy came from God. The

priests' willingness to kill Jesus was based on a belief that Jesus got His power to perform miracles from evil spirits, not from God. In other words, they must have thought Jesus was using some sort of witchcraft to raise Lazarus. Indeed, they had earlier accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, and not by the power of God (*cf.* Matthew 12:24-28, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15-19). They had directly accused him of having a devil (*cf.* Matthew 11:18, Luke 7:33, John 8:48-52, 10:20-21). So, their view of Jesus had not changed.

Third, they distinguished "that nation" as the Judeans, in contrast with the rest of the "scattered abroad children of God" that apparently referred to the tribes of exiled Israel and the Jewish people dispersed among the Greeks. In John 7:35, the reference to those "dispersed among the Gentiles" literally says "among the Hellenes" (among the Greeks). This refers to the descendants of the Jewish people who had been scattered abroad when the Greek ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy I, had sold 100,000 Jews into slavery to pay for his war with Syria. Around 283 B.C., the Sanhedrin had been compelled to make a translation of the Scriptures into Greek for the Library of Alexandria in order to get his son, Ptolemy II, to purchase the freedom of these slaves. (Wikipedia 2017, "Letter of Aristeas") However, these "Hellenes" or Hellenized Jews were reckoned of a lower caste than other Jews because their women had been subject to sexual usage by their Greek slave-masters. So, their later descendants' Israelite ancestry could not be fully verified. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 270-302, 317-344)

Fourth, it seems that Jewish rulers had some sort of expectation, presumably based upon Old Testament prophecies and especially, the promises of the Torah,¹ that all Israelites were going to be reunited back in the Holy Land fairly soon. Some sort of calculation existed among the chief priests that were being kept secret from the rest of the Sanhedrin ("You know nothing at all"), by which Caiphas, the priests of Ananus and Phiabi had seemingly determined a date for fulfillment of these prophecies. This appears to have been understood as resulting from a Jubilee reconciliation, in which all Israel would be restored to the Holy Land (Leviticus 25:10). Predicting the date would depend upon how one reckoned the Jubilees, and it was up to the High Priestly families to calculate and declare the Jubilee releases. The uneven way the "red heifer sacrifices" were performed shows that such calculations did in fact varies among some of the priestly factions. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 152-163)

Fifth, the Apostle John, being himself of priestly lineage, agreed that such a restoration of lost Israel was imminent. However, because John was free to edit this passage as late as *circa A.D.* 96, and the restoration of lost Israel had not yet occurred, we must conclude that he thought this Jubilee restoration was going to come after his death, but perhaps not much after. In other words, John's interjection here hints at some secret John knew about a Jubilee schedule calculated by the Phiabi priesthood, anticipating a regathering of Israel not long after his own death, that is, a Jubilee early in the second century. When John last edited his Gospel, the Temple had been destroyed and the Jews exiled. The Jubilee of these events was to occur in *A.D.* 119-120. However,

¹ The first five books of the Bible. The Jews and many Messianic Christians revere these books over the rest of the Bible, including the New Testament.

the Jubilee of the last harvest of the land in *A.D.* 66 (the goal of Jubilees was to rest the land) would come earlier: *A.D.* 115-116. Both John and the Phiabi priesthood knew this.

The rest of the Apostles, Paul, and much of the early church leadership also had a similar view of a soon coming restoration event. At the Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles had eagerly asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus did not in any way dismiss the premise of a restoration. He only said, "the times and the seasons" when it would happen were in God's power. Later, at the Council of *A.D.* 49, James, the brother of Jesus, cited a popular prophecy that said,

After this I will return and will build again the Tabernacle (the Temple, or perhaps the House) of David, which is fallen down. And I will build again the ruins thereof (implies a building like the Temple), and I will set it up. that the residue (survivors) of men might seek after the Lord (that is, come to His rebuilt Temple), and all the Gentiles (literally, ethnos, or peoples) upon whom My name is called (might likewise also seek after the Lord), says the Lord, who does all these things. (Acts 15:16-17)

Note the repeated emphasis upon rebuilding something that is in ruins. The Phiabis would have seen this same prophecy after the holocaust of *A.D.* 70 as a promise that God would rebuild their Temple. Naturally, they hoped it would be soon, in their own lifetime. It is useful to read the original prophecy in Amos, with its full context:

"I will not utterly destroy the House of Jacob, says the Lord. For, lo, I will command. And I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like corn is sifted in a sieve (Jewish survivors of the Roman War were sold into slavery). Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth (not an Israelite would put down roots, but all would be recovered). All the sinners of (among) My people shall die by the Sword (sinful Israelites will die in war, or perhaps die by the "Sword of the Lord," which may refer to a heavenly Destroyer). (All these sinners will die) who say, 'The Evil (the Destroyer?) shall not catch up with us nor stand in our way.' In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof. And I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in days of old. (I will do this in order) that they (the House of Jacob and Israel) may possess (or enslave) the remnant (survivors) of Edom and (the survivors) of all the peoples that are called by My name (adopted into the Lord's family), says the Lord who does this." (Amos 9:8-12)

James saw this as the Spiritual Body of Christ. In the Amos text, a great end-time war or heavenly destruction occurs (like the one Revelation describes), and God vows to rebuild Israel afterward so that it may possess as slaves the righteous survivors among the Edomites and among all the peoples called by His name. The implication is that only the righteous will be saved out of all peoples, even out of Israel, where all the "sinners" will also be killed by "the Sword." The parallel passage might be Isaiah 34, where the "Sword of the Lord" falls harder on Edom. Revelation 6 also quotes from Isaiah 34, clearly describing a cosmic upheaval in the Last Days. So, all these passages were about events far in the future to the survivors of the Temple's destruction in *A.D.* 70-71.

Yet, Ishmael's family who survived the war felt this Amos prophecy meant God was soon to restore them and make them slave-owners ruling over returned Israelites. Phiabi survival "proved" God viewed them as righteous. Survival signified they were not sinners, but righteous, inspired interpreters of the Law. They assumed survival made them also infallible interpreters of the Law thereafter, and later Jews agreed.

They felt the war was God's punishment of their Jewish rivals. Rome was the instrument of God's wrath, Josephus said. To the Phiabis, it was a divine cleansing of the land of anti-Phiabi "heretics" like the Zealots and those Christians who had fled.

Josephus identified the surviving Phiabi family as friends of himself and of Titus, the Roman commander at the destruction of Jerusalem. The Phiabis must have agreed with Josephus. They were now looking forward to the rebuilding of a Phiabi-run Israel, to the future prophesied by Amos, when God would stop the punishment of Israel and begin to rebuild it. They viewed an "inspired" Phiabi-dominated Israel as the Jubilee restoration and fulfillment of the same prophecy being cited by James and the Christians.

It seems that both the Jews and the Christians were then expecting God to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the exiled of Israel to the land. But the Law concerning this kind of restoration was the Jubilee year when everyone got to return to their land.

The Biblical "Jubilee" or 50th year (technically the 50th year was also the first year of the next 49-year cycle) was a time to, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land" (Lev 25:10). And for this reason, this very phrase was inscribed on the American "Liberty Bell" to commemorate our own successful revolution against the then British Empire, whose monarchs still trace their ancestry back to Roman rulers.

Let's recall the full passage in Leviticus, however, because the Phiabis apparently interpreted it as a key part of their plans for the years *A.D.* 115-119:

And you shall number seven Sabbaths of years unto you (to allow the land to rest and recover from the War with Rome of *A.D.* 66-70), seven times seven years (49 years of waiting for the land to recover). And the space of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be unto you 49 years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month

(October *A.D.* 115, the 49th anniversary of the "official" start of the Jewish War, October *A.D.* 66). On the Day of Atonement shall you make the trumpet sound throughout all your land (to signal the 49th anniversary of the revolt, no doubt in defiance of Roman occupation forces, who would consider trumpet calls a summons to war). And you shall hallow (the Phiabis assumed their "inspired" blessing made it holy) the 50th year, and proclaim liberty throughout (all) the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a Jubilee to you, and you shall return every man unto his possession, and you shall return every man to his family (every family should return to the Holy Land)." (Lev 25:8-10)

Even if the Phiabis felt the Bible prophesied a 49-year period of rest, when the land would lie fallow, the year *A.D.* 115-116 would have been viewed as the end of that rest and the time for reviving the fortunes of Jewish people everywhere. It would have been seen as a time for everyone to return to the land and rebuild the cities and the Temple. Phiabis saw the references to "you" as confirming their own "inspired" power as High Priests to do all this, even to literally return Jews to Israel on Phiabi-owned ships.

We must remember that the scattered remnants of Judea in *A.D.* 115 would have read the same Old Testament Bible passages we read, but in a way, they hoped applied to them at that moment. If the fatal events of *A.D.* 115-117 were indeed based upon the Jubilee, then many Jews would have gone to Palestine without Roman compulsion, because the Jubilee text ends with a formal Divine command for all Jewish men to return to the Holy Land (Leviticus 25:10). The Phiabis, of course, would have enforced this.

The Jubilee count began with the final harvest in *A.D.* 66. The Zealots chose autumn *A.D.* 66 for their revolt in part because it was the time of the fall feasts when all able-bodied men were commanded to be in Jerusalem. But it was also the beginning of the season when it was too dangerous to navigate the Mediterranean Sea. Knowing this, the Zealots hoped that the Romans would not be able to launch a counterattack until the following spring, which was indeed the case. That delay gave the Zealots time to prepare the country. They beat their plowshares into swords and halted normal farming.

The Jewish year that began in the fall of *A.D.* 66 until the spring of *A.D.* 67 was the time of the initial Zealot attacks. Therefore, they had ceased farming the land. And so, it was this time that (49 years later) could have been commemorated with a Jubilee declaration to resume farming in the fall of *A.D.* 115.

The only persons the Talmud implies had been High Priests around *A.D.* 115 and who would then have been able to declare the Jubilee, were Elisha and his son Ishmael.

We should mention that early rabbinical sources insist that Elisha and his son, Ishmael ben Elisha, were High Priests. Yet some scholars, relying on Josephus (who died before Elisha or his son may have served as High Priests) reject the idea that Elisha and his son were ever High Priests. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 97, 194-5, 233)

To recap: Under the Law of Moses, the Jubilee cycle was 49 years. So, the Jubilee of the events that occurred in the initial year of the war from the fall of *A.D.* 66 into *A.D.* 67 would have had their Jubilee year of release announced at the Yom Kippur of *A.D.* 115. But the actual time of the release would have been Pentecost of *A.D.* 116 (May or June).

The land lay fallow for 49 years. During the *A.D.* 66-70 war, the Jews could not go out into the fields to farm. The Romans won by starving them. Afterward, they were in exile. Roman siege weapons hurled thousands of large stones against towns around Judea and Galilee, leaving the farmland hard to plow. The forests were cut down to build these weapons, and the army ate everything, leaving few seed crops to replant. It took decades for the land to recover. So even without a Jubilee rest, the land would have remained largely uncultivated for much of that 49 years.

Then suddenly, in *A.D.* 115, Roman historians later wrote, "the Jews" "revolted" and began "killing their neighbors," seemingly at random, except in Judea itself. No 'revolts' are known in Judea. Thus, we are told that only the Jews in exile mysteriously began slaughtering their neighbors. (Conzelmann 1992, pp. 33-34) This strange slaughter erupted just as the 49-year Jubilee was ending.

Jews in pagan cities had their own neighborhoods and lived apart from the pagans, but Jews who converted to Christianity often still lived in Jewish neighborhoods. So, Jewish Christians were the main "non-Jewish neighbors" who were living among them and were the closest, and thus first, victims of the massacres. We can prove this.

In the Greek text of the early reports, these assaults were against the *Synoikous Hellenes*, literally, against the "jointly-dwelling Hellenes" or the Diaspora Hellenistic (Greek) Jews living within the Jewish community itself. (Schurer 1995, I:2:231) These Hellenes were descendants of the 100,000 Jewish captives sold into slavery by the Egyptian King Ptolemy I around 300 B.C., but whose freedom was later obtained in exchange for the Jews translating the Septuagint Greek version of the Hebrew Bible for his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus. (The ancient *Letter of Aristeas* preserves the tradition that Ptolemy Philadelphus purchased their freedom. So, the descendants of those dispersed Helene Jews were no longer slaves after c. 250 B.C.)

Hellenized Jews were usually the first to become Christians. (Eusebius 1979, IV:2) As Jesus was being taunted about His education in Jerusalem, the crowd wondered if He would go to "the Hellenes of the Diaspora" (literal rendering) and "teach the Hellenes" (John 7:35). There are some thirty instances in the New Testament where "Helene" Christians are identified by this term in the literal Greek. Most of these texts are mistranslated as "Gentiles." It is almost certain, then, that nearly all of those "jointly-dwelling Helene" fatalities in *A.D.* 115 were Hellenized Jewish Christians.

The hostility of Jews toward their Hellenistic Jewish Christian neighbors can be traced directly to the Phiabis. The grandson of Ishmael ben Phiabi, Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, had inherited the High Priestly robes from his father Elisha. (Jeremias 1975, p. 196n159) Rabbi Ishmael was executed by the Romans around *A.D.* 135.

But sometime before the *A.D.* 115-117 massacres, Rabbi Ishmael had already ruled that these Jews who had converted to Christianity (whom he condemned as *minim* or “heretics”) were worse than pagans (See quotes below). Ishmael said their books should be burned and “blotted out.” His grandfather had destroyed Barnabus' copies of Mark's Gospel in *A.D.* 61. Ishmael even said it was better to let loved ones die than let a Jewish Christian cure them, as the following Talmudic commentary relates:

The (Talmud records the) case of Rabbi Eleazar ben Damah, whom a serpent bit. There came in Jacob, a (Jewish Christian) man of *Kefer Sama*, to cure him in the name of Yeshua ben Pandira (= *Pantheros* = *Parthenos*; that is, Jesus, son of a Virgin), but (ben Damah's uncle) Rabbi Ishmael (grandson of the High Priest Ishmael ben Phiabi) did not allow it. He said (to his nephew, ben Damah), “You are not permitted (by Ishmael to let a Jewish Christian cure you), ben Damah.” (But) he said (to his Uncle Ishmael), I will bring you a proof(-text) that he may (be permitted to) heal me.' But (before ben Damah could do this) ...he died. Ishmael said, “Happy are you, ben Damah, for you have departed (this life) in peace....” (*Talmud Hullin* 2.22,23)

Ishmael ben Elisha preferred his nephew Eleazar ben Damah die a painful death from snake venom rather than be healed in the name of Jesus. This story was intended to illustrate a rule for dealing with “*minim*” (= heretics, that is, Jews who had become Christians). This rule had just been stated in the immediately preceding Talmud passage:

Flesh (meat)...from the hand of a Gentile (= a pagan) is permitted to be eaten (by a Jewish person), but if received from the hand of a (Jewish) heretic (i.e. one who has apostatized and become a Christian) is forbidden for use... (for) their bread is (unclean) Samaritan bread. Their wine is offered (supposedly to a demon). Their fruit is un-tithed. Their books (all Christian New Testament texts²) are books of witchcraft (hence, condemned to be burned), and (all of) their sons are bastards (they are not reckoned Jews). One (who wishes to remain in good standing in the eyes of the Phiabis) does not sell to them

² Since Ishmael died in *A.D.* 135, this shows Christians had a canon of books well before that time.

(Jewish Christians), nor receive from them, nor take from them, nor give to them. One does not teach their sons trades, and one does not obtain healing from them neither healing of property nor healing of life." (*Talmud Hullin 2.24*) (Sanders 1993, p. 62; cf. pp. 61-67)

All contact with Jewish Christians was forbidden. Anything they touched was unclean. Their books were ruled "books of witchcraft." The Phiabis forbade Jews to sell to them or buy from them, yet commerce with Gentiles was explicitly permitted.

The Phiabis hated Hellenist Jewish Christians. Moses commanded witches be executed (Exodus 22:18 and Deuteronomy 18:10). So, Ishmael's rule required executing Jewish Christians having "books of witchcraft." Such executions did in fact occur during *A.D.* 132-135; no Hellenist Jewish-Christian culture survived. (Schurer 1995, I:2:299-301, esp. 319)

Ishmael's "pure" exiles looked down on others as unclean, but they most feared Jewish Christians as contagious demonic witches. Even the New Testament records the rivalry that existed between Jews from Judea and Jews from Galilee, and between Jews of Judea and Greek-speaking Jews (Matthew 26:73, John 7:35,52, Acts 6:1-12, 11:18-20).

Judaic scholar, theologian, and convert to Christianity, Alfred Edersheim, in his *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, summarized Jewish attitudes at the time the Phiabis dominated Judaism. In particular, Edersheim noted the extremely harsh rules their rabbis imposed on Jewish people for how they were to treat non-Jews, especially those Hellenists and ex-Jews who had converted to Christianity. (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1997, vol. 1, pp. 90-92)

To begin with, every Gentile child, as soon as (it was) born, was to be regarded as unclean... Jewish workmen were not to assist in building basilicas, nor stadiums, nor (even) places where the heathen (Gentiles) pronounced judicial sentences... It was not lawful (by Phiabi rulings) to rent houses or fields, or to sell cattle to them. Milk drawn by a heathen, if a Jew had not been presented to watch it, bread and oil prepared by them, were unlawful. Their wine was wholly interdicted; the mere touch of a heathen polluted the whole cask... Jews were to avoid passing through a city where there was an idolatrous feast...

Rabbinic legislation kept certain definite objects in view, which may be summarized: To prevent Jews from being inadvertently led into idolatry. To avoid all participation in idolatry. Not to do anything which might aid the heathen in their worship. And, beyond all this, not to give pleasure, nor even help, to heathens. The latter involved a most dangerous principle, capable of almost indefinite application... (Some extremist

rabbis (and these were most likely the stricter Phiabi-related rabbis) said that) gross idolaters should be cut down with the sword...

Even the Mishnah (oral rulings recorded first in the early and then in the middle of the second century, whose early period included rulings made by identifiable members of the Phiabi family from *A.D.* 71 to 135) goes so far as to forbid aid to a (heathen) mother in the hour of her need, nor nourishment to her baby... But this is not all. Heathens were, indeed, not to be precipitated into danger, but yet, not delivered from it... (This policy was in effect during the massacres of *A.D.* 115-117).

Still more terrible was the fanaticism which directed that heretics (Christians, Gnostics), traitors (those who betrayed the Phiabi rabbis), and those who had left the Jewish faith (such as Hellenists) should be thrown into actual danger, and... all means for their escape removed. (The Phiabi rule would ensure they died.)

...it was deemed that he who had (anything) to do with heretics was in imminent peril of becoming one himself, and that, if a heretic returned to the true faith (Judaism), he should die at once, partly, probably, to expiate his guilt, and partly from fear of relapse..." (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1962, pp. 90-92) (E. L. Martin 2000, pp. 70-72; text slightly modernized)

The Phiabis created these brutal rules and enforced them upon Jewish people under their control. They lived and died by them, and so did hundreds of thousands of Jewish residents of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cyprus, Antioch, and Palestine.

Paranoia about Jewish Christianity was spread by the Phiabi hard-liners within Judaism. But this paranoia can be traced directly to the fear of Christians taught to Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha by his father Elisha, who had himself seen Mark heal and transmit the Holy Spirit by his touch. It looked like magic or witchcraft to Elisha, who would have told his son, Rabbi Ishmael, later High Priest, how he had personally witnessed Mark at Cyrene performing the "witchcraft" taught in "dangerous" Christian books. Mark's miracles in Cyrene before he escaped are specifically attested by the Coptic Christian records. (McBirnle 1973, p. 255) Rabbi Ishmael's fear of Christian healings and his conviction that Christians were engaged in witchcraft is documented by these early Coptic accounts of John Mark's miraculous spiritual gifts.

We have indirect indicators of the wide area over which the Phiabis exercised control at the time of the massacres. Elisha's son, Rabbi Ishmael, after becoming High Priest, appointed as his successor a wealthy Phiabi relative, Eleazar ben "Harsum," who had inherited his father's merchant fortune. The family owned over 1,000 ships, 1,000 towns in many nations, and huge numbers of slaves who never met him. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 97n33, 99) These assets imply a far-flung mercantile empire.

The word "Harsum" is not really a name. It means "being recorded" as if the name had been blotted out, or was missing for some reason (Daniel 10:21). (Davidson 1970, p. 222b from p. 692b) In other words, "Harsum" was not a name, but a placeholder for a name that could not then be officially recorded. This might be the case if "Harsum" were a Jewish man whose lineage was being checked for blemishes, a process that could take many years, given the state of Jewish records after the war. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 270-302) "Harsum" was so rich the authorities would have been compelled to accept his son Eleazar as High Priest. (Jeremias 1975, p. 97n33) Or perhaps, since tradition seems to misplace his name, "Harsum" or Eleazar may have been executed for some crime and the name was forgotten by the time the blotting-out expired. (More on this in EO-32.)

We have evidence non-Phiabi priests resented "Harsum" (maybe because the Phiabis stole tithes from their families). When Eleazar was to celebrate his first Yom Kippur as High Priest, his mother spent two talents of gold (roughly \$300,000 today) to have a fine, almost transparent, tunic woven for him, which the other priests refused to allow him to wear. (Jeremias 1975, p. 97) This public humiliation of Harsum's son and his widow was all the more amazing because the nation may have been fighting for its survival at the time implies this might have been during the war. (Jeremias 1975, p. 97n33)

Several 1900-year old coins found in Israel suggest Eleazar b. Harsum financed the Bar Kochba revolt of *A.D.* 132-135. (Eusebius 1979, IV: 5). So, he may have been the leading supporter of Simon Bar Kochba. (Judaic scholar Schurer felt Eleazar shared the leadership with Bar Kochba). (Schurer 1995, I:2:299) Bar Kochba (with Eleazar's backing) ordered the torture and eradication of the Jewish Christians in Galilee and Judea. (Conzelmann 1992, p. 35n) These Jewish Christians had survived the massacres of *A.D.* 115-117; but not long after *A.D.* 132, the Jewish Christian bishops (and, we must assume, most, if not all, of those Jewish Christians in their congregations) cease to be found in Palestine. (Eusebius 1979, IV: 5-6)

So, there is a direct connection between the Phiabi priesthood that financed and shared rule with Bar Kochba and the arrest, torture and extermination of all the Jewish Christians found in his territory.

Keep in mind that men like Eleazar ben Harsum thought they were doing God's work by cleansing the Holy Land of those deemed witches and demonic heretics. Lest anyone think Catholics invented witch hunts or burning heretics, the public burning of a priest's daughter (a possible Phiabi witch-hunt: Acts 8:3, 12:1-4) is attested in Jerusalem *circa A.D.* 42. (Jeremias 1975, pp. 143, 178) The Phiabis were then chief priests.

Eleazar ben Harsum's family wealth grew during 49 years of exile. It was based on shipping tied to Jewish communities of the eastern Mediterranean, including Cyrene, Alexandria, Antioch, and Cyprus. These were the same places where, from *A.D.* 115-117, Jews were supposed to have massacred their neighbors, including the Jewish Christians living among them who had been declared heretics and witches by the Phiabi leadership. But it was not Jews who did the killing, as we shall soon discover.

The mention of Eleazar's family owning huge numbers of slaves may refer to the hordes of young pagan street thugs by which seaport cities were controlled at that time. Or it might refer to Jewish children taken in lieu of debt repayments by poor Jewish families that the Phiabis had loaned money to for rebuilding Jewish communities after the war. Or it may refer to the Phiabi desire to redeem the tens of thousands of Jews and their descendants sold into slavery by the Romans after *A.D.* 70. Most likely, the Phiabi slave trade included all of these categories, and therefore, it may have involved at its peak over a hundred thousand individuals in dozens of countries. These slaves formed a network of Phiabi spies and potential assassins throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. It is little wonder the Phiabis eventually felt rich and powerful enough to challenge Rome.

The accumulation of massive riches from pagan ports implies the widespread use of bribery, extortion, and thuggery: all hallmarks of the Phiabi crime family. Ownership of towns implies the family had acquired total economic control over the people there, who discovered too late that Phiabi loans were vehicles for the confiscation of property.

The evidence implicates the Phiabis in both the massacres of Jewish Christians in *A.D.* 115-117 and the later massacres under Bar Kochba from *A.D.* 132-135. They had near-dictatorial power where these massacres occurred. They retained their wealth and power throughout this period, until at least *A.D.* 135, using it to control the Bar Kochba regime that tortured and exterminated Jewish Christians in Palestine.

The Phiabis had totally dominated most of the places that massacred thousands of Jewish Christians because of their Christian religion.

Yet the Phiabis retained their wealth and power while revolts raged in Roman city after city from *A.D.* 115-117. They even held onto their riches and influence after Roman armies suppressed the violence and moved Jewish populations to Judea. Thus, they must have been prepared for everything that took place, including the Roman response.

Therefore, the widespread slaughter and its aftermath seem to have been planned in advance. The Phiabis seemed to be engaged in ethnic cleansing. But we must be cautious. The facts show that the killings were not carried out by practicing Jews at all, but by the pagans, perhaps the ones the Phiabi merchants had employed.

If the killings are linked to the Phiabis, the descriptions of the slaughter in the cities are all the more disturbing. According to Roman historian Dio Cassius, writing decades later, "the Jews" ate the flesh of their victims, smeared themselves with their blood, sawed them through from head to foot, and wrapped themselves in their skin and filthy entrails. (Edersheim, *History*

of the Jewish Nation 1979, p. 184). The number murdered at Cyrene alone, Dio Cassius said, was about 220,000. (Schurer 1995, I: 2: 283) But is this what really happened?

Hardly. It comes from a pagan historian ignorant about Jewish cleanliness law. For example, how could it be that, during the massacres, "the Jews ate the flesh of their victims?" This is obviously false. The reason for Jews to kill their Jewish Christian neighbors was supposedly fear of contamination by them. It makes no sense to "cleanse" their neighborhoods of these "heretics" only to immediately make themselves and their communities totally unclean by eating the flesh of the victims. The fact that the Jewish people continued to insist on strict ritual purity after the massacres of hundreds of thousands of "unclean" victims show the Jews felt they had not been contaminated and thus would not have engaged in this unclean bloodbath. (Schurer 1995, I: 2: 283)

There was only one way for massacres of such horrible numbers of people within the Jewish communities to have been carried out, yet leave the Jewish survivors ritually clean and untouched by that blood: The Jews must have left before the slaughters began. And they did not return to these now contaminated places. The evidence shows that this is indeed what happened.

It is clear that someone else carried out the murders, someone that the Roman historians could later view as proxies for the departed Jewish authorities. The only group we know that had historically engaged in this kind of blood-drinking and cannibalism of their victims were the pagan gangs of the seaport cities where these slaughters occurred. (Frazier 1890, 1993, especially the descriptions of the cannibalistic rituals)

None of this was Jewish behavior. Instead it suggests the Phiabis had recruited pagan gangs, whose behavior it fits exactly. In fact, Alexandrian gangs executed John Mark in *A.D.* 66. (McBirnie 1973, p. 256) When convicted of a capital offense in Alexandria, it was the city custom to hand the victim over to these pagan thugs for execution. This is still further indication that the Phiabis considered Jewish Christian victims to be guilty of a capital crime, apparently witchcraft, as we saw previously.

We have also seen that the Phiabi family had huge fleets of ships and slaves at their disposal. The Phiabi merchant empire could not function without the active support of these gangs of pagan thugs who controlled these seaport cities. Even the corrupt Christian bishops of the fourth and fifth centuries needed the help of these pagan gangs to remain in power. (Rubenstein 1999, pp. 1-6, 62-65, etc.)

Now that we know pagan gangs carried out such killings, we can reconstruct the sequence of events. The Phiabis waited for the Jubilee year, planning a mass exodus back to the Holy Land using their own ships. Obviously, they were not going to take along with them pagan thugs or the Jewish Christian "heretics." Using their vast fleet of vessels, the Phiabis quietly prepared to evacuate their ports of loyal Jewish exiles.

The accounts indicate the massacres came as surprise attacks. This implies the local Jews escaped in quiet pre-dawn evacuations onto waiting for Phiabi ships that would transport them to the Holy Land. The Phiabi ships formed a great armada as they gathered in each successive

port to rescue the Jewish families and their cherished possessions. What they could not carry they converted to gold. To avoid alerting the Christians, the armada had to arrive during the night of each successive evacuation.

It may be that coordinators of this exodus told people to leave behind some “gifts” (Exodus 12:35-36). The pagan gangs looted this booty as part of their payment. The gangs also gained partnership with on-shore Phiabi merchant interests, and seized hundreds of small shops the Jews abandoned. The Phiabis had to leave agents in these cities to maintain some measure of control over their shipping industry docks and warehouses.

The first evacuation began in Cyrene in *A.D.* 115, near the 50th anniversary of Ishmael ben Phiabi's exile to that city in *A.D.* 65 and the 49th year Jubilee of his beheading there in *A.D.* 66. The timing and location of this first evacuation and the massive fleet required are confirmations that this was a Phiabi planned and executed the operation.

When the Jewish evacuees were safely on board, the pagan gangs (whether or not the Phiabis paid them to do it) began the bloody massacre of the Jewish Christians still naively asleep in their homes. Some 220,000 were killed during the next few days.

The second city targeted was Alexandria, along with all the Jewish towns in the Delta and Nile Valley. The Great Synagogue in Alexandria was torched. This was almost certainly a Greek-speaking Hellenistic synagogue. The Phiabi priests were elitists, as the New Testament emphasizes (John 7:45-49). Not to be forgotten was the old rivalry between the house of Simeon Boethius from the Greek-speaking city of Alexandria and the Phiabis who had come to power by marrying into the house of Ananel from Aramaic-speaking Babylon. Many old grievances may have been settled in Alexandria that first night.

The target then shifted to the city of Salamis on the Jewish-controlled island of Cyprus. This particular city on Cyprus had been until *A.D.* 115 the center of the Jewish Christian publishing industry, the main source for Christian Bibles. It was also a Levitical enclave of the family of David's metals business, cemented by the marriage of Cypriot Stephen to Joseph of Arimathea's daughter Hanna, grandmother of John Mark, which would have been a factor in the Phiabi desire to see the city obliterated.

Salamis, which means “peace” in Hebrew, was leveled to the ground. Some 24,000, mostly Jewish Christians, were massacred. The pagans gained control of the whole island. No Jew was allowed, under penalty of death. (Schurer 1995, I:2:284)

This implies the Phiabis had negotiated with the pagans to surrender all Jewish control of Cyprus, which was the primary source of the copper needed to make Roman helmets and body armor. It is impossible to imagine that the Phiabis would just toss such a key asset to the wind. They must have cut a deal with the Roman imperial government itself to surrender forever Jewish involvement in the island's metal industry. In return, as we shall see, the Phiabis obtained a major favor from the Romans.

Another main target was the city of Antioch, where the Holy Spirit had first “called” (literally, “divinely proclaimed”) the name “Christian” upon believers (Acts 11:26). The early

Christian church of Antioch was overflowing with prophets (Acts 13:1). It was where Paul was sent forth to preach by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2-4). To the Phiabis, Antioch had been an original seedbed of Christianity.

From there, violence spread inland across increasingly Christian Asia Minor and down toward southern Mesopotamia. (Schurer 1995, 1:2:285) The list of places needing rebuilding afterward included Arabia, Spain, Sicily, and Italy itself. Millions of Jews arrived in Palestine. Slaughter of Jewish Christians may have been Empire-wide.

The census rolls in some areas like Cyprus and rural Egypt right after these massacres show no Jews left. (Conzelmann 1992, p. 34) At a minimum, this shows that the Phiabi family, which we know for a fact survived these events, was not in these places at the time of the slaughter. Clearly, they had packed up and left on their ships, knowing in advance what was about to happen. Either Romans had killed all the Jewish residents, which is the usual assumption (Ibid.), or else the Romans had resettled them in Palestine.

Evidence in support of the resettlement theory is that Trajan, the emperor in charge at the time of these massacres, was originally considered pro-Jewish. (Conzelmann 1992, p. 34) But a stronger clue is that Trajan ordered his commander Lucius Quietus to "clear" the Jews out of Parthia and then put him in charge of Judea. (Eusebius 1979, IV: 2) All of Cyprus was also "cleared." (Conzelmann 1992, p. 33) Egypt's tax revenues from Jews vanish after the revolt, proving Egypt also had been swept empty of its Jewish population. (Conzelmann 1992, p. 34) Those Jews who supposedly revolted are presumed by modern scholars to have been annihilated. (Eusebius 1979, IV: 2) In light of the Jubilee exodus, it is likely that most Jewish people were eager to return to the Holy Land and did so gladly. Many of the so-called "revolts" may then have been quasi-Jewish outcasts fighting back against pagan gangs cleansing their communities of Jewish Christians and others the Phiabis had "left behind."

As we have seen, when massacres occurred, the Jews had already been evacuated in advance. The Phiabis did not want to be around when the slaughters were carried out. They also feared Christian witchcraft might be used against them. They were paranoid about the magical powers of Christians. But if these Jewish Christians were deemed to have magical powers, then they must have been openly manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit with many miraculous actions and healings, as the Talmudic warnings about Jewish-Christian healings of that time vividly attest. (Sanders 1993, pp. 61-67)

It seems massacres stretched from Spain in the west to the mountains of Ararat in Turkey and the deserts of Arabia. The exterminations swept nearly all lands of initial Jewish Christian evangelism. Based on the population of Christians in *A.D.* 115, these massacres almost eliminated Christianity. (Wilken 1984, pp. 31-32) The first two generations of Spirit-filled Christians converted by the Apostles and their disciples constituted nearly all those hundreds of thousands of victims.

Here, then, is the answer to the question, "Whatever happened to the lost first generation of Apostolic, Holy-Spirit-powered Jewish Christianity?" It did not fade away. It was martyred on a colossal scale. It was not gradually replaced by Gentile Christianity. It was suddenly exterminated

by pagan criminal gangs. Gentiles took over the Christian church by default. The handful of Jewish-Christian survivors were later hunted down and butchered by an anti-Semitic Roman Church, not sparing descendants of the family of Jesus itself. (M. Martin 1981, pp. 41-44)

Only the Phiabi leaders and their pagan thugs had known massacres were about to occur. Most Jewish families were told they were being rescued from *pogroms* planned by local pagans. As Edersheim documented, Phiabi rules forbade Jews to warn their Jewish Christian neighbors about what the pagans were planning. In short, only the Jewish Christians were kept totally in the dark about what was going to happen.

Strict Phiabi warnings to Jews not to have any contact with their Christian neighbors guaranteed Jewish Christians would be taken by surprise. The fact that so many were killed so quickly shows the Phiabi prohibitions were thoroughly ingrained in Jewish practice well before *A.D.* 115. The prohibitions against any contact with Christians, while allowing contact with pagans, hints that Phiabi restrictions on Christian contact could have contributed to the process of extermination. (Sanders 1993, p. 62)

The killings targeted Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in port cities who could spread Christianity by sea and read the Greek of the New Testament, those books of "witchcraft" the Phiabis tried to burn. As Ishmael ben Elisha said of his dead nephew, whom he prevented from being healed by a Christian, the Hellenes would die "in peace" because they were being "rescued" from Christian demonic contamination. (Sanders 1993, p. 61) As we saw, pernicious logic 'justified' these deaths by claiming the Phiabis were saving their Jewish neighbors from Christian demons. They were supposedly being rescued from fates worse than death, namely from possession by spirits of Christian "witchcraft."

The Phiabis had struck a lethal blow against Apostolic Jewish Christianity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit by which it had spread so rapidly. The Romans promptly rewarded the Phiabis for this service to the Empire in several surprising ways....

As the lost history of the church continues, we will reveal a forgotten rebuilt Jewish Temple and the mysterious fate of Trajan. And we will explore the Phiabi intrigues of the two dark generations before "doomsday" in *A.D.* 135, when all things changed for Pagans, Jews, and Christians alike.

Coming later:

For Your Eyes Only:

Southern Crossing: Joseph of Arimathea & the Chinese Junket

Appendix: In *Defense* of the Phiabi Rabbis

The Romans, both in wars and persecutions, sought to annihilate their targets. The word itself is Roman. Those who escaped Roman annihilation called it a miracle. Josephus thought his survival (with one other person) after a Roman siege was a miracle. Christians who escaped from Jerusalem to Pella before the war attributed their rescue to divine prophecy. The Apostle John escaped Nero's persecution in *A.D.* 64, and the Roman Church still commemorate it as a miracle.

So, it should not seem strange that the rabbis who escaped the siege of Jerusalem also believed God brought about their rescue. Josephus specifically identifies three sons of Ishmael ben Phiabi among these lucky survivors, and he says they ended up living with the rest of the rabbis and priests whom the Romans resettled at Yavneh on the coast of Palestine.

The Jewish casualties in the *A.D.* 66-73 war were *circa* 90% and many of the remainders were sold into slavery or prostitution and scattered to the four winds. There was no Temple, no priestly sacrifice, and they were banished from the rubble of Jerusalem. They were also forbidden to publish. Any new religious laws or the forming of a Sanhedrin would have to be communicated orally, often in secret, person to person. The land of Palestine was a ruin, with hardly a major Jewish town left intact. The farms were largely unplowable, for not only had the ground been broken up to find boulders to hurl in the sieges, but the army had eaten the oxen needed to plow the soil. Most of the young men were dead or gone. Older women and young children scavenged for food. Out of these devastated scraps the rabbis hoped to rebuild a great people.

And they did. They sent out messengers to their brethren in other provinces and set up a new Sanhedrin in that little coastal town. Having no one else to look to, Jewish people in the rest of the Empire began to accept the decisions of these refugee rabbis.

God had prophesied He would leave a remnant, and so far as the rabbis could see, they and these scattered enclaves were all who were left. But they had hope, for there were still many as-yet-unfulfilled divine prophecies that presupposed a future Jewish nation. Trusting that one day God would revive their nation has sustained them for another 65 generations.

The Phiabis played a role in the fulfillment of these prophecies. Their early rabbinical leadership helped save that prophesied remnant and rebuild its numbers and unity for the long march of centuries that lay ahead. They believed God had miraculously saved them for a great mission, and they were right. Yet, that mission was unnecessarily tarnished when they allowed the pagans to slaughter those Jews who did not adhere to the Phiabi way of thinking. The Phiabis deluded themselves that it was regrettable, but necessary, culling of the herd.

They also assumed their survival had been a reward for religious purity. So, they issued ever stricter rules designed to ensure further Jewish survival by maintaining isolation from any taint of contamination, especially Christianity, which the Phiabis insisted was an infectious kind of witchcraft. Their paranoia led them to abandon thousands of dissident Jews to be butchered by pagan gangs. In the end, the Phiabis became the very thing they feared most: Religious fanatics

possessed by magical delusions that punished (sometimes by death) multitudes of Jewish people for infractions of Phiabi rules that nearly all modern Jews violate today with impunity.

The original Phiabi priests had often been scoundrels. Their rabbinical sons sought to restore the family's reputation by acts of extremist piety. It was a misguided, but arguably sincere quest that diverted them into a spiritual witch-hunt. The irony is, ethically, the Judaism that has now evolved is not far from the modern Christian path. Who knows what the Phiabis might have achieved if they had first pursued a friendship with, not the elimination of, Christianity?

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