

# Section 9 – Patriarchal Monotheism

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## Insurrection

During the first century CE there were repeated rebellions in Judea, aimed at throwing out the Romans. The leaders of these popular movements were both political and religious. It could not have been otherwise since religion and politics were indivisible. Anyone able to mobilise and organise resistance to Roman rule in a temporal sense must have based his power in religion.

Regardless of the feelings of the general population about the Romans, the establishment – the religious leaders of the Temple and the Herods and associated aristocracy – were fervent appeasers of Rome in order to maintain their position. They carried out its will in all matters temporal. At the same time, they preached that if the Jews strictly observed the religious code of the Bible, then Jahweh, one day, would reward them by destroying the Romans. The evidence of the many insurrections of the period tells us that the establishment view was not universally popular and that, amongst the ordinary people, anger against the occupation frequently boiled over into violence.

To be against both occupiers and a supine political class is one thing, but to whom could a revolutionary activist movement appeal, and how? There were two potential constituencies: the rural poor and women. Both of these groups were disenfranchised under the established Judaism of the time. Polytheism repeatedly appeared amongst these groups and this maintained the establishment's anger.<sup>1</sup> The polytheism that they would have returned to was probably the reforming cult of Ba'al and Astarte, since this is so often, and so bitterly, attacked in the Bible. On the other hand, women's allegiance to Asherah, El/Jahweh's consort, had been almost impossible for the establishment to eradicate or suppress, especially outside Jerusalem. The increasing pressure of misogyny, instead of killing off Asherah and women's loyalty to her for good, appears to have had the opposite effect and women clung to their Goddess, as they had been doing since the dawn of human culture.

By the time Jesus is said to have lived, these two constituencies were ripe fruits for the plucking by a creative and imaginative religious leader who challenged the authorities, which is exactly what the Gospels say Jesus did.

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<sup>1</sup> Patai 1990.

In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly breaks Jewish law by talking to and indeed helping women to whom he is not related. One of these is a Samaritan, a group shunned by the Jewish establishment.<sup>2</sup> He is surrounded by women but never marries – in other words he never becomes the possessor of a female slave, to which it was tantamount. When he is anointed with oil – the name ‘Christ’ just means ‘Anointed One’ – *it is by a woman*.<sup>3</sup> In Matthew and Mark, this happens at the home of Simon the Leper, in Luke it happens at the home of a Pharisee named Simon, and in John it happens in the house of Lazarus before Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Although the details differ, the powerful scene in each case symbolically confers upon Jesus the right to rule in the name of the Goddess. It is exactly as we have seen in Sumer and Egypt: the right and power to reign flows from the Goddess but is administered by a man.

The rural poor living in Judea and Galilee were largely the descendants of the Judahites who had been left behind during the Babylonian Exile. Shepherds, who metaphorically represent the rural poor, are celebrated all over the Gospels, and Jesus himself is identified as a ‘good shepherd’. In the same way and for the same reasons, he is identified as a carpenter and a fisherman. On the other hand, the Jewish elite – the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the priesthood itself, as well as the rich and powerful – could not be painted in a worse light. The overall strategy is clear; the writers of the Gospels were appealing to marginalised and disaffected groups in the region.

Whoever wrote the stories was targeting these groups, and it doesn’t matter whether it was Jesus himself or his real followers or even if Jesus was a literary invention. In any of these cases, the result would have been the same.

Jesus’ message was aimed at those who had been most victimised by the ruthless social conservatism of established Judaism. He was a reaction to centuries of such oppression, an explosion of despair that was at the same time a cry of hope.<sup>5</sup>

So what was the message? It is clear: love, forgiveness and resurrection. These core messages of the Goddess are at the heart of the Christian faith. They are what distinguish it from the harsh, punitive excess of Hebrew Scripture. Jesus preached forgiveness, the helping of those who are not of your faith or nation, the healing of the sick, the succour of the poor, the celebration of women, the rising again after death, the pardoning of sins.

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<sup>2</sup> John 4:4-26.

<sup>3</sup> In each story, the woman appears to be an independent woman who has the means to purchase expensive perfumed oil and ignores the indignation of the surrounding men. The fact that the women are, in some cases, described as ‘sinful’ probably only means they are unmarried. This will be elaborated in a later chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8.

<sup>5</sup> While the authors hold differing opinions about the historicity of Jesus, we are in complete agreement that it does not matter. The facts need not be historical for the metaphor to be true. Knowing this helps us understand the appeal of all mythologies.

At the core of the Gospels' message we have the Goddess